

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JULY 2015

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

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Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35

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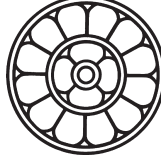
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R.N. 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVIII

No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE MEDITATIONS OF MANDAVYA

I

O joy of gaining all the soul's desire!
O stranger joy of the defeat and loss!
O heart that yearnest to uplift the world!
O fiercer heart that bendest over its pain
And drinkst the savour! I will love thee, O Love,
Naked or veiled or dreadfully disguised;
Not only when thou flatterest my heart
But when thou tearst it. Thy sweet pity I love
And mother's care for creatures, for the joys
I love thee that the lives of things possess,
And love thee for the torment of our pains;
Nor cry, as some, against thy will, nor say
Thou art not. Easy is the love that lasts
Only with favours in the shopman heart!
Who, smitten, takes and gives the kiss, he loves.

2

Blue-winged like turquoise, crimson-throated, beaked,
Enormous, fluttering over the garden wall
He came to me, some moments on a bough
Was perched, then flew away, leaving my heart
Enchanted. It was as if thou saidst, "Behold, my love,
How beautiful I am! To show thee this,
I came, my beauty. Now I flee away
Since thou hast seen and lov'st." So dealst thou always,
Luring and fleeing; but our hearts pursue.

3

While on a terrace hushed I walked at night,
He came and stung my foot. My soul surprised
Rejoiced in lover's contact; but the mind
Thought of a scorpion and was snared by forms.
Still, still my soul remembered its delight,

Denying mind, and midst the body's pain,
I laughed contented.

4

All is attained, attained! The pain is dead,
The striving. O thou joy that since this world
Began, wast waiting for me in thy lair.
O Wild Beast of the ways who torest my soul
With rapture felt as pain.
O cruelty divine! O pity fierce!
O timeless rapture of the nights that pass
Embraced, poignant and pure with Thy caress!
Humanity, acceptable I find
Thy ages that have wept out sweat and blood,
Since all was made to give its utter price
To one wild moment of thy hidden God.
Let the whole world end now, since all for which
It was created is fulfilled at last
And I am swallowed up in Thee, O God.

II

Who made of Nature here a tyrant? Who
Condemned us to be slaves? It was not God.
Nay, we ourselves chose our own servitude
And we ourselves have forged and heaped our chains
On our own members. God only watched the while
And mocked us sweetly at our childish task.
Then if He seized us helpless in our bonds,
Then if He played with us despite our cries
And answered with His dreadful laugh our wrath,
Ours was the fault who chose that bondage first,
Ours is the folly whom His play affrights
While all the time He tells us, "It is nought."
And now we say we never can be free,
For Nature binds us, for the fire must burn,
The water drown and death must seize his prey
And grief and torture do their will with us
And sin be like a lion with the world,
Because 'tis Nature. Man's not infinite,

The proof is with us every day, they cry,
 And God Himself's a huge machine at last.
 Yet over us all the while Thought's lightnings play
 And all the while within us works His love.
 Now more than when the play began, He laughs.

2

Now I believe that it is possible
 To manage the arising clouds, to silence
 The thunder when it roars and put our rein
 Upon the lightnings. Only first within
 The god we must coerce who wallows here
 In love with his subjection and confined
 By his own servants, wantonly enslaved
 To every lure and every tempting bond.
 And therefore man loves power, but power o'ercome,
 Force that accepts its limits. Wherefore then
 A limit? Why not dare the whole embrace,
 The vast attraction? Let us risk extinction then
 If by that venture immortality
 And high omnipotence come near our grasp.
 'Tis not the little rippling wayward seas,
 Nor all huge ocean tumbled by its storms
 That can be our exemplar. The vault of heaven
 Is not a true similitude for man
 Whose space outgyres thought's last horizon. Something
 There is in us fears not the night beyond,
 But breathless sails, unanchored, without helm,
 Where mind and senses fail. Our naked soul
 Can journey to the farther unshaped void
 Where nothing is except ourselves, arrive, hold on,
 Not shake, not ask return. Who accepts at last
 His limit save the beast and plant and clod?
 O to be perfect here, to exceed all bounds,
 To feel the world a toy between our hands!
 Yet now enough that I have seized one current
 Of the tremendous Force that moves the world.
 I know, O God, the day shall dawn at last
 When man shall rise from playing with the mud
 And taking in his hands the sun and stars

Remould appearance, law and process old.
 Then, pain and discord vanished from the world,
 Shall the dead wilderness accept the rose
 And the hushed desert babble of its rills;
 Man once more seem the image true of God.

3

I will not faint, O God. There is this thirst,
 And thirst supposes water somewhere. Yes,
 But in this life we may not ever find;
 Old nature sits a phantom by the way,
 Old passions may forbid, old doubts return.
 Then are there other lives here or beyond
 To satisfy us. I will persist, O Lord.

III

What is this Love that I have never found?
 I have imagined in the skies a God,
 And seen Him in the stirring of the leaves,
 And heard Him in the purling of the brooks,
 And feared Him in the lightning's flashing tusk,
 And missed Him in the mute eternal night,
 And woke to Him in the returning Dawns.
 And now I say there is no God at all,
 But only a dumb Void that belches forth
 Numberless larvae and phantasmal shapes
 Into a void less happy than itself
 Because this feels. O if this dream were true,
 This iron, brute, gigantic helpless toy
 They call a world, this thing that turns and turns
 And shrieks and bleeds and cannot stop, this victim
 Broken and living yet on its own wheel,
 And if a Will created this, what name
 Shall best blaspheme against that tyrant God?
 Let all men seek it out and hurl it up
 Against Him with one cry, if yet perchance
 Complete denial may destroy His life
 With happy end to His unhappy world.
 For where in all these stars is any sign of Love?

It is not here, but that which seems like Love
 Is a sleek cruel cheat that soon unmasks,
 Sent here to make the final suffering worse, —
 Not Love, but Death disguised that strokes its food!
 And all good in the world is only that.
 A death that eats and eating is devoured,
 This is the brutal image of the world.

—

Lo, I have cursed Thee, lo, I have denied
 Thy love, Thy being. Strike me with Thy rod,
 Convince me that Thou art. O leave it not
 To Thy dumb messengers that have no heart,
 No wrath in the attack, no angered love,
 No exultation in the blow that falls,
 The cry that answers. Let me feel a Heart,
 Even though an evil one, that throbs and is
 Against our tears, our pressure and our search.
 Beware, for I will send my soul across the earth
 And all men turn against Thee at my word.
 There is no sign, there comes not any voice.
 And yet, alas! I know He will return
 And He will soothe my wounds and charm my heart;
 I shall again forgive, again shall love,
 Again shall suffer, be again deceived.
 And where is any end, O Heaven, O Earth?
 But there is never any end when one has loved.

—

A sudden silence and a sudden sound,
 The sound above and in another world,
 The silence here; and from the two a thought.
 Perhaps the heart of God for ever sings
 And worlds come throbbing out from every note;
 Perhaps His soul sits ever calm and still
 And listens to the music rapturously,
 Himself adoring, by Himself adored.
 So were the singer and the hearer one
 Eternally. The anthem buoyant rides

For ever on the seas of Space and Time
 And worships the white Bliss from which 'twas born;
 The ineffable Delight leans silent down
 And clasps the creatures of its mystic cry
 For ever and for ever without end.

—

Who art thou that pursuest my desire
 Like a wild beast behind the jungle's screen
 And throw'st a dread upon its fiercest fire,
 A shadow on its flowering joy and green?
 Thou madest and deniest me my need,
 Thou jealous Lover and devouring Greed!

—

Who spoke of God? There is a hungry Beast
 In ambush for the world who all devours,
 Yet is his hunger sated not the least.
 He tears our beauty, strength and happiest hours,
 And eats our flesh and drinks our blood and tears,
 Ranging as in a thicket through the years.

—

Dost thou desire my last vain hope? Take it, rejoice!
 Wilt thou exact my dying bliss? Tear it and end!
 But give me this at least, dying, to hear thy voice
 By thee as foeman slain if never clasped as friend.

—

Foeman or friend, lover or slayer, only thee
 I need and feel, O personal Eternity.

—

If what thou gavest, thou must needs again exact,
 Cancel thy forms, deny thy own accomplished fact,
 With what wilt thou replace them? Is thy nameless void

Embraceable by arms? Or can the soul upbuoyed
 Rest on a shoreless emptiness without a name?
 Can Love find rapture by renouncing all his flame?
 Thou hast forgotten or our nature is misled.
 Lur'st thou to utter life beyond the silence dead?

—

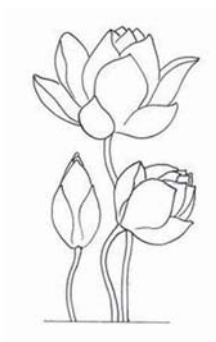
Not sound, nor silence, neither world nor void,
 But the unthinkable, absolute, unalloyed
 One, multitudinous, nameless, yet a Name,
 Innumerably other, yet the same.
 Immeasurable ecstasy where Time
 And Space have fainted in a swoon sublime!

—

Of silence I have tired, from the profounder Night
 I come rejected. All the immensities overhead
 Are given to my fierce upwinging soul at last
 Rapt into high impossible ranges huge outspread.
 Unnumbered voices thrill the silent waiting Vast,
 A million flames converge into the rayless Light.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 509-15)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

PART TWO THE OPENING OF THE INNER SENSES

SECTION THREE: SYMBOLS

Chapter One: Symbols and Symbolic Visions

Different Kinds of Symbols

A symbol, as I understand it, is the form on one plane that represents a truth of another. For instance, a flag is the symbol of a nation. But generally all forms are symbols. This body of ours is a symbol of our real being and everything is a symbol of some higher reality. There are, however, different kinds of symbols:

(1) Conventional symbols, such as the Vedic Rishis formed with objects taken from their surroundings. The cow stood for light because the same word *go* meant both ray and cow, and because the cow was their most precious possession which maintained their life and was constantly in danger of being robbed and concealed. But once created, such a symbol becomes alive. The Rishis vitalised it and it became a part of their realisation. It appeared in their visions as an image of spiritual light. The horse also was one of their favourite symbols, and a more easily adaptable one, since its force and energy were quite evident.

(2) What we might call Life-symbols, such as are not artificially chosen or mentally interpreted in a conscious deliberate way, but derive naturally from our day-to-day life and grow out of the surroundings which condition our normal path of living. To the ancients the mountain was a symbol of the path of Yoga, level above level, peak upon peak. A journey involving the crossing of rivers and the facing of lurking enemies, both animal and human, conveyed a similar idea. Nowadays I dare say we would liken Yoga to a motor ride or a railway trip.

(3) Symbols that have an inherent appositeness and power of their own. Akasha or etheric space is a symbol of the infinite all-pervading eternal Brahman. In any nationality it would convey the same meaning. Also, the Sun stands universally for the supramental Light, the divine Gnosis.

(4) Mental symbols, instances of which are numbers or alphabets. Once they are accepted, they too become active and may be useful. Thus geometrical figures have been variously interpreted. In my experience the square symbolises the Super-

mind. I cannot say how it came to do so. Somebody or some force may have built it before it came to my mind. Of the triangle, too, there are different explanations. In one position it can symbolise the three lower planes, in another the symbol is of the three higher ones: so both can be combined together in a single sign. The ancients liked to indulge in similar speculations concerning numbers, but their systems were mostly mental. It is no doubt true that supramental realities exist which we translate into mental formulas such as Karma, psychic evolution etc. But they are, so to speak, infinite realities which cannot be limited by these symbolic forms, though they may be somewhat expressed by them; they might be expressed as well by other symbols, and the same symbol may also express many different ideas.

The Effect of Symbolic Visions

It is the same with the symbols in Yoga [*as with images in mystic poetry*]. One puts an intellectual label on the “White Light” and the mind is satisfied and says, “Now I know all about it; it is the pure divine Consciousness light,” and really it knows nothing. But if one allows the Divine White Light to manifest and pour through the being, then one comes to know it and get all its results. Even if there is no labelled knowledge there is the luminous experience of all its significance.

*

The vision of the moon and the rain of flowers means always the falling of the light of spirituality on the consciousness (the moon) and the descent of a psychic influence (flowers). These things are symbols to the mind, but in the inner experience they have a reality and can produce a tangible effect.

Some Symbolic Visions and Dreams Interpreted

The depth of the sleep in your experience was intended to make you go deep inside and, as soon as you did so, you entered into the psychic and spiritual state which takes the figure of the beautiful *maidān* and the flow of white light and the coolness and peace. The staircase was a symbol of the ascent from this psychic and spiritual state into higher and higher levels of the spiritual consciousness where is the source of the light. The Mother’s hand was the symbol of her presence and help which will draw you up and lead you to the top of the ladder.

*

The separate images [*in a mystic poem submitted by the correspondent*] are very usual symbols of the inner experience, but they have been combined together here in a rather difficult way. The fire of course is the psychic fire which wells up from the veiled psychic source. The bird is the soul and the flower is the rose of love and surrender. The moon is the symbol of spirituality. As the star is within it is described as piercing through the knots of the inner darkness and worsting the vital growths that are like clouds enwrapping it. The boat also is a usual symbol in the inner visions. The elephant is the spiritual strength that removes obstacles and the horse the force of tapasya that gallops to the summits of the spiritual realisation. The sun is the symbol of the higher Truth. The lotus is the symbol of the inner consciousness.

*

The vision you saw was a symbol of the outward physical consciousness obscured by the ordinary movements (clouds), but with the spirituality (the moon) still spreading its light everywhere from behind the ordinary human ignorance. The dog indicates something in the physical (the part that is faithful, obedient etc.) waiting confidently for the Light to come.

The fire you felt was the fire of purification and the heat came because it was burning up some resistance, — after that was burnt out there was coolness and peace and quietude. The voices and sounds and impression of X being there indicate a confused activity of the occult sense in the vital which hears things other than the physical. When this kind of thing comes, there has to be a quiet rejection in the being and the thing will pass away. Some people get interested and have a lot of trouble because they get into the habit of hearing voices and seeing and feeling things which are only partly or sometimes true but mixed with much that is false and misleading. It is good that there was something in your vital being which rejected it.

*

The dream is evidently an indication of the difficulty you are experiencing. The sea is the sea of the vital nature whose flood is pursuing you (desires are the seawater) on your road of sadhana. The Mother is there in your heart but sleeping — i.e. her power has not become conscious in your inner consciousness because she is surrounded by the thin curtain of skin (the obscurity of the physical nature). It is this (it is not thick any longer but still effective to veil her from you) which has to go so that she may awake. It is a matter of persistence in the will and the endeavour — the response from within, the awaking of the Mother in the heart will come.

*

It is probably a symbol of three stages or developments or planes of spiritualised life. A star means creation, the triangle a triple principle. The tree is life in a new creation. Green is the colour of the emotional vital, the moon governs a spiritualised emotional life; blue is the colour of the higher mind, the moon there governs a spiritualised higher mind life; the gold colour is that of the Divine Truth, whether intuitive or overmind — the moon here is the spiritualised Truth-life. As the star is *sphaṭika*-coloured, the triangle may indicate Sachchidananda principle. The butterflies and birds are of course life forces and soul forces, powers or beings. Probably it indicates three stages of transformation before the supramental can reign altogether or else three that will exist as the steps towards the supramental.

*

Your dreams were very beautiful and, symbolically, very true. By the way, let me repeat, they were not really dreams; the state between sleep and waking or which is neither sleep nor waking is not a dozing but an inward gathered consciousness, quite as much awake as the waking mind, but awake in a different plane of experience.

As for the dream of the cobras it could be taken as an answer to your complaints against the Divine being grim and solemn and refusing to play and your remark that if you could have the faith that the troubles were a part of the Divine plan leading you through them to the Divine, you would be more at ease. The answer of the symbolic experience was that the Divine can play if you know how to play with him — and bear his play on your shoulders; the cobras and the bite indicate that what seems to you in the vital painful and dangerous may be the very means of bringing you the ecstasy of the Divine Presence.

Less generally the cobras are the forces of the evolution, the evolution towards the Divine. Their taking the place of the legs means that their action here takes place in the physical or external consciousness, in the evolution of the external mind, vital, physical towards the experience of the Divine and of the Divine Nature. The bite of the cobras (Shiva's cobras!) does not kill, or it only kills the "old Adam" in the being; their bite brings the ecstasy of the presence of the Divine — that which you felt coming upon your head as trance waves. It is this trance ecstasy that has descended upon you each time you went inside or were even on the point of going inside in meditation. It is the universal experience of sadhaks that a force or consciousness or Ananda like this first comes from above — or around — and presses on or surrounds the head, then it pierces the skull as it were and fills first the brain and forehead, then the whole head and descends occupying each centre till the whole system is full and replete. (Of course there are or can be preliminary rushes occupying the whole body for a time or some other part of the system most open and least resistant to the influence.)

* * *

Chapter Two: Sun, Moon, Star, Fire

Sun

Fire, lights, sun, moon are usual symbols and seen by most in sadhana. They indicate movement or action of inner forces. The Sun means the inner truth.

*

The sun is the symbol of the concentrated light of Truth.

*

The Sun is the Truth-Light of the One Existence and the flame the dynamic power of action (Yogic) of that Truth-Light.

*

The Sun is the divine Truth-Light on whatever plane of consciousness. It is, I suppose, the original cosmic Truth that is here indicated.

*

The Sun is the Truth from above, in the last resort the Supramental Truth.

*

The sun is the symbol of the Supermind.

*

The sun in the Yoga is the symbol of the supermind and the supermind is the first power of the Supreme which one meets across the border where the experience of spiritualised mind ceases and the unmodified divine Consciousness begins the domain of the supreme Nature, *parā prakṛti*. It is that Light of which the Vedic mystics got a glimpse and it is the opposite of the intervening darkness of the Christian mystics, for the supermind is all light and no darkness. To the mind the Supreme is *avyaktāt param avyaktam* but if we follow the line leading to the supermind, it is an increasing affirmation rather than an increasing negation through which we move.

*

Supermind is not mind at all, it is something different. The Sun indicates Truth directly perceived in whatever plane it may be. It is the symbol of Supermind but the Truth may come down into the other planes and then that is no longer supramental but modified to the substance of the other planes — still it is the direct Light of Truth.

*

The sun rising on the horizon is the direct light of the Divine Truth rising in the being — the ray upwards opens the being to the Truth as it is above mind, the ray in front opens it to what we call the cosmic consciousness, it becomes released from the personal limitation and opens and becomes aware of the universal mind, universal physical, universal vital. The action on the heart was the pressure of this Sun on it to have this direct opening, so that the consciousness may become free, wide and wholly at peace.

*

There are different suns in the different planes, each with its own colour. But there are also suns of a similar colour above, only more bright, from which these minor suns derive their light and power.

*

The golden [*Sun*] is the Light of the Truth on the higher planes. The white [*Sun*] is the Sun of the Mother's consciousness (the Divine Consciousness) which manifests on all the planes.

*

The white sun indicates the purity and peace of the Divine Consciousness.

*

The red sun is a symbol of the true, illumined physical consciousness which is to replace the obscure and ignorant physical consciousness in which men now live. Red is the colour of the physical; the red diamond is the Mother's consciousness in the physical.

*

In the experience the disc of the sun indicates the supramental consciousness with the Divine Being in it (the supramental Divine who can bridge by his light the gulf between the higher and the lower consciousness and unify them). But the smoky appearance, the veil etc. indicated that there was something in the (human) nature that made rapid realisation difficult. This was what was also said by the voice that the time was not yet. Obviously the supramental cannot be achieved except by a long sadhana — the experience should not be taken as meaning anything more than that.

Moon

The moon signifies the light of spirituality or of the spiritual consciousness.

*

The moonlight indicates the light of the spiritual consciousness.

*

The moonlit *maidān* is the spiritual consciousness at the doors of which you are standing as it were and feeling its peace and ease.

*

The moon generally indicates spiritual realisation in the mind.

*

The moon indicates different things according to circumstances — most often spiritual consciousness in the mind.

*

The light above the head is never an imagination in Yoga; if it is felt, it is because it is there. If it is the moon, it means the light of the spiritual consciousness in the mind.

*

The moon as a symbol in vision signifies usually spirituality in the mind or, simply, the spiritual consciousness. It can also indicate the flow of spiritual Ananda (nectar is in the moon according to the old tradition).

*

The moon indicates spirituality, sometimes also spiritual Ananda.

*

It [*spiritual mind, symbolised by the moon*] is Mind in contact with truths of the spirit and reflecting them. The Sun is the light of the Truth, the Moon only reflects the light of the Truth — that is the difference.

*

Golden light means the light of the higher Truth — the moon is the symbol of spirituality. A golden moon means a power of spirituality full of the light of the higher Truth.

*

The moon, as I have already written, indicates spirituality — the crescent form means a commencement of the spiritual light. The position near the knee would indicate an action on the physical consciousness — for all below the Muladhara down to the feet is the physical province.

*

The moon is sometimes a symbol of the Light in the mind, — if it is a full moon. The crescent moon may be a symbol of growing spirituality of the mind centre.

Star

The star signifies a creation or formation or the promise or power of a creation or formation.

*

The star is always a promise of the Light to come; the star changes into a sun when there is the descent of the Light. It is not possible to fix the actual value of these signs for the future; they indicate a turn or a possibility, but everything depends on herself and the future orientation she gives to her being.

*

Stars in such visions¹ indicate points of light or of higher experience in the consciousness. The earth means the physical consciousness.

*

Stars indicate points of light in the ignorant mental consciousness.

Moon = spiritual light

Sun = the higher Truth light

*

They [*gold stars in the sky*] are simply indications of divine Truth in the mind — the sky is a symbol of mind very often.

*

The sky is always some mental plane. The stars indicate beginnings or promises of Light — the various lights indicating various powers of the consciousness: gold = Truth, blue = higher spiritualised mind, violet = sympathy, unity or universal compassion.

Fire and Burning

The fire indicates a dynamic action.

*

The white fire is the fire of aspiration, the red fire is the fire of renunciation and tapasya, the blue fire is the fire of spirituality and spiritual knowledge which purifies and dispels the Ignorance.

*

1. *In one vision the correspondent saw stars in the sky, in another stars upon earth. — Ed.*

The fire is always the fire of purification — it is very red when it is acting on the vital; when the vital no longer covers the psychic, then the rose colour of the psychic comes out more and more.

*

It is the purification of the physical that is usually indicated in the symbol of burning.

* * *

Chapter Three: Sky, Weather, Night and Dawn

Sky

The sky usually symbolises a plane of consciousness mental or higher than the ordinary mental — stars are formations of light on that plane.

*

The sky is a symbol of the mental consciousness (or the psychic) or other consciousnesses above the mind — e.g. the higher mind, intuition, overmind etc. Akasha as the ether indicates also the infinite.

*

The sky in the heart is the chidakash. It is seen usually above the head, but when it is seen in the heart, that means the opening of the heart to the higher consciousness.

*

The blue sky is that of the Higher Mind — the nearest of the planes between human mentality and the Supermind. The moon here [*in a vision*] is the symbol of spirituality in the mental planes. The world of the Higher Mind is above those directly connected with the body consciousness.

*

The higher consciousness on any of its levels is seen usually as a sky or ether, but when felt through the vital it is often perceived as a sea.

*

Sat, Chit, Ananda, Supermind, Mind, Life, Matter are the seven [*seas of consciousness mentioned in the Veda*]. But in this Yoga one sees many levels of consciousness which appear as skies or else as seas.

Rain, Snow, Clouds, Lightning, Rainbow

The rain is the symbol of the descent of Grace or of the higher consciousness which is the cause of the riches — the spiritual plenty.

*

The vision you saw of the snow is probably a symbol of the consciousness in a condition of purity, silence and peace like a snowy ground; in that a new life (psychic, spiritual as indicated by the flowers) appears in place of the old mental and vital life which has been covered by that mantle of snowy whiteness.

*

Clouds are a symbol of obscurity.

*

The lightning is a symbol of the dynamic force of the higher consciousness acting at intervals to enlighten the rest of the being.

*

The rainbow is the sign of peace and deliverance.

Night and Dawn

The Night is the symbol of the Ignorance or Avidya in which men live just as Light is the symbol of Truth and Knowledge.

*

Dawn always means an opening of some kind — the coming of something that is not yet fully there.

* * *

Chapter Four: Water and Bodies of Water

Water

Water is the symbol of a state of consciousness or a plane.

Sea or Ocean

The sea with the sun over it is a plane of consciousness lit by the Truth. To enter into the rays is to be no longer merely lit by it, but in one's own conscious being to begin to become part of the Truth.

*

A sea in tumult usually indicates a vital upheaval or a period of strain and stress and struggle.

*

The blue ocean is often a symbol of the spiritual consciousness in higher Mind one and indivisible.

*

Normally, the ocean of higher consciousness is above the head (mind) and all below is that of the lower consciousness. Your seeing of the two oceans rather means that in the descent the influence of the higher consciousness reaches down to the heart (emotional being with the psychic behind it), but does not yet reach below in the lower vital and physical — but it is dissolving the knot in the heart centre which prevents the descent into the lower vital and physical centres. The joy in the *śānta svarūpa* is indeed a sign of the release of the heart centre. But the phrase in the Upanishads refers more particularly to the breaking of the knots of desire, attachment, sanskara, ego in the heart, which stand in the way of spiritual liberation and ascension — not to the knot which prevents the descent.

Pond, Lake, River

When the water is symbolic [*it is a plane of consciousness*] and here it is a big expanse of water — but a river or a pond are not large enough to symbolise a plane.

It may be an actual experience in another world — or it may be the symbol of a particular movement in the sadhana.

It is not from dreams that you can know what plane of consciousness you are living in; it is by an observation of your condition.

*

Sometimes a part of the consciousness is seen in the image of a pond, lake or sea. The fish must be the vital mind.

*

The lake is the being in its individual consciousness, the sea is the same being with a universalised consciousness which can hold the universe and its cosmic forces in itself — the one (individual) merges into the other (the universal). The boat is the formation of the Mother's consciousness in you in which you are preparing to sail on this sea.

*

The river represents some movement of the consciousness. All these are images of the vital plane.

* * *

Chapter Five: Earth

Mountain

The mountain is the symbol of the embodied consciousness based upon earth but rising up towards the Divine.

*

The mountain always represents the ascending hill of existence with the Divine to be reached on the summits.

*

The mountain always means the same thing — it is the ascending consciousness.

*

The mountain is an image of the ascending consciousness.

*

The mountain is a very usual symbol of the consciousness with its ascending levels. The flowing of water from the peak indicates some flow from the higher consciousness above.

*

The mountain represents the ascending planes of the higher consciousness. The journey in the train is the passage from one consciousness to another.

*

The bucket is the physical consciousness; milk is always a symbol of the flow of consciousness from Above; the mountain is the Adhar with its ascending levels from the physical to the Above.²

*

The golden mountain is a symbol of the ascent to the Truth.

*

The Golden Mountain is always the mountain of the Divine Truth which one has to ascend — at its summit is the dwelling place of the Divine.

*

The experience of the great expanse of golden light on a mountain-top came because I had asked X to aspire for the higher experiences of the consciousness from above. The symbolic image of the mountain with the light on its top comes to most sadhaks who have the power of vision at all. The mountain is the consciousness rising from earth (the physical) through the successive heights (vital, mental, above-mental) towards the spiritual heaven. The golden light is always the light of the higher Truth (Supermind, Overmind or a little lower down the pure Intuition) and it is represented as a great luminous expanse on the summits of the being. X by concentrating on the light entered into contact with the higher reaches and that always gives these results, peace, joy, strength, a consciousness secure in the power of the Divine. It is of course through the

2. In a vision during meditation, the correspondent saw a stream of milk flowing down a mountain and filling a bucket at its base. — Ed.

psychic that she got into this contact, but in itself it is more an experience of the higher spiritual consciousness above mind than a psychic experience.

*

The silvery narrow way upward is the path of the spiritual consciousness.

Earth and Patala

Patala simply means the subconscious below the Earth — the Earth being the conscious physical plane.

*

You had asked the other day about the subconscious, what it was. In the vision you describe you were shown the universal subconscious in the figure of Patala, a place without light of consciousness and, because universal, therefore without bounds or end — the dark unconscious infinite out of which this material universe has arisen — it is walled with darkness on all sides, it seems also to have no bottom. The Light comes from above from the higher consciousness and coming down through the mind and heart and vital and physical has to pour down into this subconscious and make it luminous.

*

“Patala” is a name for the subconscious — the beings there [*in a dream*] had no heads, that is to say, there is there no mental consciousness; men have all of them such a subconscious plane in their own being and from there rise all sorts of irrational and ignorant (headless) instincts, impulses, memories etc. which have an effect upon their acts and feelings without their detecting the real source. At night many incoherent dreams come from this world or plane. The world above is the super-conscious plane of being — above the human consciousness — there are many worlds of that kind; they are divine worlds.

* * *

Chapter Six: Gods, Goddesses and Semi-Divine Beings

Agni

There are many forms of Agni, — the solar fire, the vaidyuta fire and the nether fire are one Trinity — the fivefold fire is part of the Vedic symbolism of sacrifice.

*

The vision you saw of the man and the fire at his feet was probably a vision of the God Agni from whom flows the fire of tapasya and purification in the sadhana.

Shiva

The vision you had was of the way to the goal. Shiva on the way is the Power that pours the light but also scrutinises the sadhak to see whether he is ready for the farther advance. When he lets him pass, then is the rush of new and higher experiences, the march and progress of the divine forces, the Gods and their powers, the transformation of the nature into a higher consciousness. It was these powers that you saw passing in your vision.

Parvati-Shankara

It is probably the realm of the dynamic creative Spirit on the highest mental plane which you saw as the world of Parvati-Shankara.

Narayana, Vishnu, Brahma, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ananta

Narayana is usually taken as a name of Vishnu — to the Vaishnavas he is the Supreme as Shiva is to the Shaivas. Both are cosmic Personalities of the Divine and both like Brahma have their original plane in the Overmind, although they take different forms to the human consciousness in the mental, vital and subtle physical planes.

Lakshmi is usually golden, not white. Saraswati is white.

The snake is simply a symbol of Energy or Power. Narayana in your dream is clearly Vishnu as is shown by the presence of Lakshmi and the single many-hooded snake.

Vishnu or Narayana in this image which is a normal Puranic image is the Lord

of the waters of Space and Time — the Preserver of the principle of the Universe which he maintains as a seed in himself even in the intervals between one creation and another. Out of that seed in his navel (the navel is the central seat of the Vital, the Life-Principle) Brahma the Creator arises in the Lotus (cosmic consciousness) which grows from it when Vishnu awakens from the inter-cyclic sleep. The Snake Ananta is the Energy of the cosmic manifestation of the Infinite in Space-Time.

Krishna

This is the Krishna of the Gita³ (the boy Krishna is the Krishna of Brindavan), — Krishna bringing the spiritual knowledge, will, bhakti — and not love and bhakti alone.

The eye indicates the vision of the higher spiritual consciousness and the blue expanse indicates that consciousness.

*

The boy with the flute is Sri Krishna, the Lord descended into the world-play from the divine Ananda; his flute is the music of the call which seeks to transform the lower ignorant play of mortal life and bring into it and establish in its place the lila of his divine Ananda. It was the psychic being in you that heard the call and followed after it.

*

It is, I suppose, the image of Sri Krishna as Lord of the divine Love and Ananda — and his flute calls the physical being to awake out of the attachments of the physical world and turn to that Love and Ananda.

*

Krishna with Radha is the symbol of the Divine Love. The flute is the call of the Divine Love; the peacock is victory.

*

3. In a dream the correspondent saw Sri Krishna in the prime of manhood. This image disappeared and gave way to a large eye seen in a vast expanse of blue. — Ed.

The green circular disc you saw round Venus must indeed have been the aura of Venus which is of that colour; but this was only an introduction, a first application of the suddenly developed power of vision. Afterwards what came, the blue and the violet, were another kind of seeing more important for your Yoga; both are closely associated with Krishna. Blue is his especial and significant colour, the colour of his aura when he manifests, — that is why he is called *Nil Krishna*; the adjective does not mean that he was blue or dark in his physical body whether in Brindavan or Mathura or Dwarka! Violet is the radiance of Krishna's protection, — that was why, very naturally, it brought to you a sense of peace. The Mother says that she always saw it when she was in communion with Krishna and now too constantly sees it enveloping the Asram. That this should be the first thing shown when the power of vision broke through its state of latency is very significant; it proves that you are in contact, the touch already there in your inner being and this force of presence and protection is already around you or over you as an environing influence.

Hanuman

Hanuman stands for Bhakti.

*

Hanuman = complete bhakti.

*

Hanuman is a symbol of Shakti and devotion.

Narada

Narada stands for the expression of the Divine Love and Knowledge.

Mahakali and Kali

Mahakali and Kali are not the same, Kali is a lesser form. Mahakali in the higher planes appears usually with the golden colour.

*

These — Kali, Shyama, etc. — are ordinary forms seen through the vital; the real Mahakali form whose origin is in the Overmind is not black or dark or terrible, but golden of colour and full of beauty, even when formidable to the Asuras.

Durga on a Lion

The lion with Durga on it is the symbol of the Divine Consciousness acting through a divinised physical-vital and vital-material force.

*

The lion is the attribute of the Goddess Durga, the conquering and protecting aspect of the Universal Mother.

The Death's Head is the symbol of the Asura (the adversary of the gods) vanquished and killed by the Divine Power.

Ganesh

It is according to the need or else the condition of the consciousness that these figures [*of the Gods*] appear in sadhana. Ganesh is at once the god of wisdom and the remover of obstacles.

*

Ganesh (among other things) is the devata of spiritual Knowledge — so as you are getting this knowledge, you saw yourself in this form, identified with Ganesh.

Kartikeya

The peacock is the bird of victory and Kartikeya the leader of the divine forces.

Sanatkumar

Sanatkumar is, I believe, one of the four mind-born sons of Brahma; he cannot therefore be identical with Skanda who is a son of Shiva.

Buddha

Buddha stands for the conquest over the Ignorance of the lower Nature.

Apsaras

Apsaras generally indicate sexual desire.

* * *

Chapter Seven: The Human World

Child

The child is usually the symbol of the psychic being.

*

A dream like this of a child — especially a newborn child — usually signifies the birth (i.e. the awakening) of the soul or psychic being in the outward nature.

*

The child usually signifies the psychic being — newborn in the sense that it at last comes to the surface. The colour of the cloth [*bright yellow*] would mean that it comes with health (internal or external or both) and the spiritual riches.

*

The infant in the Mother's arms is the symbol of the psychic being.

*

It is not a fact that the psychic being always appears as a baby — it is sometimes seen symbolically as a newborn baby; many see it as a child of varying ages — it is a very common and usual experience; it is not peculiar to emotional natures. It has several significances such as the new birth of the consciousness into the true psychic nature, the still young growth of this new being, the trust, reliance, dependence of the child on the Mother.

*

The child (when it does not mean the psychic being) is usually the symbol of something newborn in some part of the consciousness.

*

I suppose the golden child is the Truth-Soul which follows after the silver light of the spiritual. When it plunges into the black waters of the subconscious, it releases from it the spiritual light and the sevenfold streams of the Divine Energy and, clearing itself of the stains of the subconscious, it prepares its flight towards the supreme Divine (the Mother).

Parents and Relatives

In these dreams the parents or relatives mean the ordinary forces of the physical consciousness (the old nature).

*

A relative is generally a symbol of some element of the hereditary nature (the external being so far as it is created by heredity).

*

Mother, sister or other relatives are usually in such dreams symbols of forces of ordinary nature. The exact meaning depends on the context. But all such dreams are not symbolical — a sex dream for instance may bring up the form of any woman known or unknown.

*

These vital dreams are not interpretable unless there is an evident clue. Aunt or mother usually indicates the ordinary physical nature, a closed room would be some part of the physical nature that was not open to the light, bats would mean forces of the night, i.e. ignorant movements finding a lodging in the obscurity of the unenlightened nature.

*

It [*seeing relatives in dreams*] is the impression left by the past life and its sanskaras that come up in these dreams from the subconscious. They have to be rejected till the impressions are rooted out.

Robbers

The robbers are, as in the Veda, vital beings who come to steal away the good condition or else to steal the gains of the sadhana.

Journeying

The image of journeying always signifies a movement in life or a progress in sadhana.

*

Journeying on a horse or in a conveyance, if symbolic, means a progress or a movement in life, work or sadhana.

*

A journey in a boat or other conveyance means always a movement in the Yoga — often an advance or progress.

*

A journey in a carriage, train, motor car, steamer, boat, aeroplane etc. indicates a movement in the sadhana. The white horse may be the sattwic mind and the red horse the vital rajas giving energy and both combining to make a progress.

*

Aeroplane, steamer and train are always symbols of a rapid progress or forward movement.

*

The railway train at full speed means rapid progress.

*

The railway line is a symbol of rapid progress and the three stars are a symbol of Divine Grace in the mind, life and body.

*

The moving on the sands — it frequently happens in these dreams — is usually a sign of an easier movement in the sadhana.

Running Away

The running away [*in dream*] is a symbol of the inertia in part of the being which allows the forces to invade, drawing back from them and losing ground instead of facing and destroying them.

Flying

When you find yourself flying it is always the vital being in the subtle body in the vital world that is doing it.

*

Flying during sleep over houses, streets, etc. simply means that the consciousness in the vital sheaths has gone out and is moving over places in the vital or subtle physical world (even sometimes the material); it is always in the vital sheath that one flies like that.

The ascending movement is different — in that it is the consciousness that goes high up to other planes or levels and comes down again to the body.

Ears

The ears signify usually the place of inspired knowledge or else of inspired expression — red and gold mean truth and power joined together.

Teeth

Symbolically, if the dream is symbolic, the falling of teeth means the disappearance of old fixed mental habits belonging to the physical mind.

*

The breaking or falling of teeth [*in dream*] is symbolic usually of the breaking or falling off of habitual formations or sanskaras in the physical mind.

Flesh

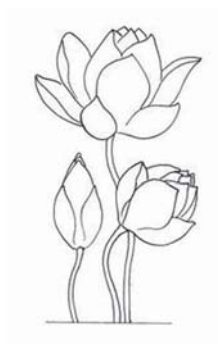
The piece of flesh indicates something restless in the physical being which stands by its restlessness and excessive materiality in the way of the full flow of the Ananda. In the dream this became active and was eliminated by the pressure of the psychic.

Being Dead

The feeling of being dead in a vision or dream experience comes when something in the being is to be silenced into entire inactivity and ceases to exist as a part of the nature. It may be a very small part, but as during the process the consciousness is concentrated in it and identified with it for the purpose of the working, the feeling is that “I am dead”. When you said, “I am dead, now let me get up and go”, it simply meant, “The thing is done and the process is over. There is no need to identify myself with this part any longer.” There is no indication in the experience as to what the thing was that passed through this experience.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 135-64)



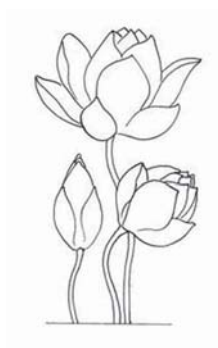
‘THOU ART THE SOLE REALITY, O LORD’

May 18, 1914

Thou art the sole Reality, O Lord, Thou art Omnipotence and Eternity. And he who is united with Thee in the depths of his being becomes Thy Reality in its eternal and immutable omnipotence. But for others the command is, even while remaining in contact with Thee, to turn their eyes and activity towards the earth; such is the mission Thou hast given them. Here begins the difficulty, for everything depends upon the perfection of the various states of their being and, even after attaining the sublime identification, they must still work at perfecting the instrument which will manifest Thy divine Will. This is where the task becomes arduous. Everything seems to me mediocre, insufficient, neutral, almost inert in the present instrument which Thou makest me call “myself”; and the more I am united with Thee, the more do I realise the mediocrity of its faculties and its manifestation. Everything in it seems to me an incorrigible approximation. And if that cannot disturb me in any way, it is because the true self is lying at Thy feet or nestling in Thy heart or conscious with Thy eternal and immutable Consciousness, and looks at the whole manifestation with a smile of patient and understanding benevolence.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 146)



A CONVERSATION OF 21 APRIL 1929

There is a common idea that visions are a sign of high spirituality. Is this true?

Not necessarily. Moreover, to see is one thing but to understand and interpret what is seen is quite another thing and much more difficult. Generally, those who see are misled because they give the meaning or interpretation they wish to give according to their desires, hopes and prepossessions. And then, too, there are many different planes in which you can see. There is a mental seeing, a vital seeing, and there are some visions that are seen in a plane very close to the most material. The visions that belong to the last category appear in forms and symbols that seem to be absolutely material, so clear and real and tangible they are. And if you know how to interpret them you can have very exact indications of circumstances and of the inner condition of people.

Let us illustrate. Here is a vision that someone actually had. A road climbs up a steep and precipitous hillside, bathed in full bright sunlight. On the road a heavy coach drawn by six strong horses is proceeding with great difficulty; it is advancing slowly but steadily. Arrives a man who looks over the situation, takes his position behind the coach and begins to push it or tries to push it up the hill. Then someone comes who has knowledge and says to him, "Why do you labour in vain? Do you think your effort can have any effect? For you it is an impossible task. Even the horses find it difficult."

Now the clue to the meaning of the vision lies in the image of the six horses. Horses are symbols of power and the number six represents divine creation; so the six horses signify the powers of divine creation. The coach stands for realisation, for the thing that has to be realised, achieved, brought up to the summit, to the height where dwells the Light. Although these powers of creation are divine, it is a hard labour even for them to consummate the realisation; for they have to work against heavy odds, against the whole downward pull of nature. Then comes in the human being in his arrogance and ignorance, with his small fund of mental powers and thinks that he is somebody and can do something. The best thing he can do is to step inside the coach, sit down comfortably and let the horses carry him.

Dreams are quite a different thing. They are more difficult to interpret, since each person has his own world of dream imagery peculiar to himself. Of course, there are dreams that do not signify much, those that are connected with the most superficial and physical layer of consciousness, those that are the result of stray thoughts, random impressions, mechanical reactions or reflex activities. These have no regular or organised form and shape and meaning; they are hardly remembered and leave almost no trace in the consciousness. But even dreams that have a somewhat

deeper origin are still obscure, since they are peculiarly personal, in this sense that they depend for their make-up almost entirely upon the experiences and idiosyncrasies of the individual. Visions also are made up of symbols that do not necessarily obtain universal currency. The symbols vary according to race and tradition and religion. One symbol may be peculiarly Christian, another peculiarly Hindu, a third may be common to all the East and a fourth only to the West. Dreams, on the other hand, are exclusively personal; they depend upon everyday occurrences and impressions. It is exceedingly difficult for one man to explain or interpret another's dream. Each man is like a closed circle to every other man. But everyone can study for himself his own dreams, unravel them and find out their meaning.

Now the procedure to deal with dreams and the dreamland. First become conscious — conscious of your dreams. Observe the relation between them and the happenings of your waking hours. If you remember your night, you will be able to trace back very often the condition of your day to the condition of your night. In sleep some action or other is always going on in your mental or vital or other plane; things happen there and they govern your waking consciousness. For instance, some are very anxious to perfect themselves and make a great effort during the day. They go to sleep and, when they rise the next day, they find no trace of the gains of their previous day's effort; they have to go over the same ground once again. This means that the effort and whatever achievement there was belonged to the more superficial or wakeful parts of the being, but there were deeper and dormant parts that were not touched. In sleep you fell into the grip of these unconscious regions and they opened and swallowed all that you had laboriously built up in your conscious hours.

Be conscious! Be conscious of the night as well as of the day. First you have to get consciousness, afterwards, control. You who remember your dreams may have had this experience that, even while dreaming, you knew it was a dream; you knew that it was an experience that did not belong to the material world. When once you know, you can act there in the same way as in the material world; even in the dreaming, you can exercise your conscious will and change the whole course of your dream-experience.

And as you become more and more conscious, you will begin to have the same control over your being at night as you have in the day, perhaps even more. For at night you are free, at least partially, from slavery to the mechanism of the body. The control over the processes of the body-consciousness is more difficult, since they are more rigid, less amenable to change than are the mental or the vital processes.

In the night the mental and vital, especially the vital, are very active. During the day they are under check, the physical consciousness automatically represses their free play and expression. In sleep this check is removed and they come out with their natural and free movements.

What is the nature of dreamless sleep?

Generally, when you have what you call dreamless sleep, it is one of two things; either you do not remember what you dreamt or you fell into absolute unconsciousness which is almost death — a taste of death. But there is the possibility of a sleep in which you enter into an absolute silence, immobility and peace in all parts of your being and your consciousness merges into Sachchidananda. You can hardly call it sleep, for it is extremely conscious. In that condition you may remain for a few minutes, but these few minutes give you more rest and refreshment than hours of ordinary sleep. You cannot have it by chance; it requires a long training.

How is it that in dreams one meets and knows people whom one meets and knows afterwards in the outer world?

It is because of the affinities that draw certain people together, affinities in the mental or the vital world. People often meet in these planes before they meet upon earth. They may join there, speak to each other and have all the relations you can have upon earth. Some know of these relationships, some do not know. Some, as are indeed most, are unconscious of the inner being and the inner intercourse, and yet it will happen that, when they meet the new face in the outer world, they find it somehow very familiar, quite well-known.

Are there no false visions?

There are what in appearance are false visions. There are, for instance, hundreds or thousands of people who say that they have seen the Christ. Of that number those who have actually seen Him are perhaps less than a dozen, and even with them there is much to say about what they have seen. What the others saw may be an emanation; or it may be a thought or even an image remembered by the mind. There are, too, those who are strong believers in the Christ and have had a vision of some Force or Being or some remembered image that is very luminous and makes upon them a strong impression. They have seen something which they feel belongs to another world, to a supernatural order, and it has created in them an emotion of fear, awe or joy; and as they believe in the Christ, they can think of nothing else and say it is He. But the same vision or experience if it comes to one who believes in the Hindu, the Mohammedan or some other religion, will take a different name and form. The thing seen or experienced may be fundamentally the same, but it is formulated differently according to the different make-up of the apprehending mind. It is only those that can go beyond beliefs and faiths and myths and traditions who are able to say what it really is; but these are few, very few. You must be free from every mental construction, you must divest yourself of all that is merely local or

temporal, before you can know what you have seen.

Spiritual experience means the contact with the Divine in oneself (or without, which comes to the same thing in that domain). And it is an experience identical everywhere in all countries, among all peoples and even in all ages. If you meet the Divine, you meet it always and everywhere in the same way. Difference comes in because between the experience and its formulation there is almost an abyss. Directly you have spiritual experience, which takes place always in the inner consciousness, it is translated into your external consciousness and defined there in one way or another according to your education, your faith, your mental predisposition. There is only one truth, one reality; but the forms through which it may be expressed are many.

What was the nature of Jeanne d'Arc's vision?

Jeanne d'Arc was evidently in relation with some entities belonging to what we call the world of the Gods (or as the Catholics say, the world of the Saints, though it is not quite the same). The beings she saw she called archangels. These beings belong to the intermediate world between the higher mind and the supramental, the world that Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind. It is the world of the creators, the "Formateurs".

The two beings who were always appearing and speaking to Jeanne d'Arc would, if seen by an Indian, have a quite different appearance; for when one sees, one projects the forms of one's mind. To what you see you give the form of that which you expect to see. If the same being appeared simultaneously in a group where there were Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Shintoists, it would be named by absolutely different names. Each would say, in reference to the appearance of the being, that he was like this or like that, all differing and yet it would be one and the same manifestation. You have the vision of one in India whom you call the Divine Mother, the Catholics say it is the Virgin Mary, and the Japanese call it Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy, and others would give other names. It is the same Force, the same Power, but the images made of it are different in different faiths.

What is the place of training or discipline in surrender? If one surrenders, can he not be without discipline? Does not discipline sometimes hamper?

Maybe. But a distinction must be made between a method of development or discipline and a willed action. Discipline is different; I am speaking of willed action. If you surrender you have to give up effort, but that does not mean that you have to abandon also all willed action. On the contrary, you can hasten the realisation by lending your will to the Divine Will. That too is surrender in another form.

What is required of you is not a passive surrender, in which you become like a block, but to put your will at the disposal of the Divine Will.

But how can one do this before the union has been effected?

You have a will and you can offer that will. Take the example of becoming conscious of your nights. If you take the attitude of passive surrender, you would say, "When it is the Divine Will that I should become conscious, then I shall become conscious." On the other hand, if you offer your will to the Divine, you begin to will, you say, "I will become conscious of my nights." You have the will that it should be done; you do not sit down idle and wait. The surrender comes in when you take the attitude that says, "I give my will to the Divine. I intensely want to become conscious of my nights, I have not the knowledge, let the Divine Will work it out for me." Your will must continue to act steadily, not in the way of choosing a particular action or demanding a particular object, but as an ardent aspiration concentrated upon the end to be achieved. This is the first step. If you are vigilant, if your attention is alert, you will certainly receive something in the form of an inspiration of what is to be done and that you must forthwith proceed to do. Only, you must remember that to surrender is to accept whatever is the result of your action, though the result may be quite different from what you expect. On the other hand, if your surrender is passive, you will do nothing and try nothing; you will simply go to sleep and wait for a miracle.

Now to know whether your will or desire is in agreement with the Divine Will or not, you must look and see whether you have an answer or have no answer, whether you feel supported or contradicted, not by the mind or the vital or the body, but by that something which is always there deep in the inner being, in your heart.

Is not an increasing effort of meditation needed and is it not true that the more hours you meditate the greater progress you make?

The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. It is a proof of your progress when you no longer have to make an effort to meditate. Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditating: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness. Then you are sure of progress, then you have made real progress when concentration in the Divine is the necessity of your life, when you cannot do without it, when it continues naturally from morning to night whatever you may be engaged in doing. Whether you sit down to meditation or go about and do things and work, what is required of you is consciousness; that is the one need, — to be constantly conscious of the Divine.

But is not sitting down to meditation an indispensable discipline, and does it not give a more intense and concentrated union with the Divine?

That may be. But a discipline in itself is not what we are seeking. What we are seeking is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement. There are some here who have been told to meditate; but also there are others who have not been asked to do any meditation at all. But it must not be thought that they are not progressing. They too follow a discipline, but it is of another nature. To work, to act with devotion and an inner consecration is also a spiritual discipline. The final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation but in all circumstances and in all the active life.

There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful. They sit self-complacent in it and forget the world; but if they are disturbed, they come out of it angry and restless, because their meditation was interrupted. This is not a sign of spiritual progress or discipline. There are some people who act and seem to feel as if their meditation were a debt they have to pay to the Divine; they are like men who go to church once a week and think they have paid what they owe to God.

If you need to make an effort to go into meditation, you are still very far from being able to live the spiritual life. When it takes an effort to come out of it, then indeed your meditation can be an indication that you are in the spiritual life.

There are disciplines such as Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga that one can practise and yet have nothing to do with the spiritual life; the former arrives mostly at body control, the latter at mind control. But to enter the spiritual life means to take a plunge into the Divine, as you would jump into the sea. And that is not the end but the very beginning; for after you have taken the plunge, you must learn to live in the Divine. How are you to do it? You have simply to jump straight in and not to think, "Where shall I fall? What will happen to me?" It is the hesitation of your mind that prevents you. You must simply let yourself go. If you wish to dive into the sea and are thinking all the time, "Ah, but there may be a stone here or a stone there", you cannot dive.

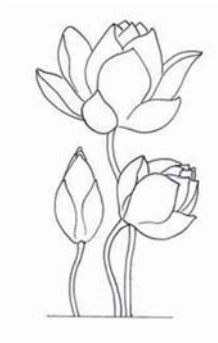
But you see the sea and so you can jump straight into it. But how are you to jump into the spiritual life?

Of course, you must have had some glimpse of the Divine Reality, as you must see the sea and know something of it before you can jump into it. That glimpse is usually the awakening of the psychic consciousness. But some realisation you must have — a strong mental or vital, if not a deep psychic or integral contact. You must have felt strongly the Divine Presence in or about you; you must have felt the breath of the Divine world. And you must have felt too as a suffocating pressure the opposite breath of the ordinary world, drawing you to an endeavour to come out of that oppressive atmosphere. If you have that, then you have only to seek refuge unreservedly in the Divine Reality and live in its help and protection, in it alone.

What you may have done in the course of your ordinary life only partially or in some parts of your being or at times and on occasions, you must do completely and for good. That is the plunge you have to take, and unless you do it, you may do Yoga for years and yet know nothing of a true spiritual living. Take the whole and entire plunge and you will be free from this outer confusion and get the true experience of the spiritual life.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 13-22)



A CONVERSATION OF 28 APRIL 1929

It has been said that in order to progress in Yoga one must offer up everything to the Divine, even every little thing that one has or does in life. What is precisely the meaning of that?

Yoga means union with the Divine, and the union is effected through offering — it is founded on the offering of yourself to the Divine. In the beginning you start by making this offering in a general way, as though once for all; you say, “I am the servant of the Divine; my life is given absolutely to the Divine; all my efforts are for the realisation of the Divine Life.” But that is only the first step; for this is not sufficient. When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that the whole of your life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it and carry it out in all the details of your existence. You must feel at every step that you belong to the Divine; you must have the constant experience that, in whatever you think or do, it is always the Divine Consciousness that is acting through you. You have no longer anything that you can call your own; you feel everything as coming from the Divine, and you have to offer it back to its source. When you can realise that, then even the smallest thing to which you do not usually pay much attention or care, ceases to be trivial and insignificant; it becomes full of meaning and it opens up a vast horizon beyond.

This is what you have to do to carry out your general offering in detailed offerings. Live constantly in the presence of the Divine; live in the feeling that it is this presence which moves you and is doing everything you do. Offer all your movements to it, not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions such as eating; when you eat, you must feel that it is the Divine who is eating through you. When you can thus gather all your movements into the One Life, then you have in you unity instead of division. No longer is one part of your nature given to the Divine, while the rest remains in its ordinary ways, engrossed in ordinary things; your entire life is taken up, an integral transformation is gradually realised in you.

In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, “When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it.” To persist in this attitude means that you will remain untransformed and never have the true union; always you will be divided; you will have at best only glimpses of this greater life. For although certain experiences and realisations

may come to you in meditation or in your inner consciousness, your body and your outer life will remain unchanged. An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life, is of no great use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world, they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force.

An ideal of this kind may be good for those who want it, but it is not our Yoga. For we want the divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here. But if we want the Divine to reign here we must give all we have and are and do here to the Divine. It will not do to think that anything is unimportant or that the external life and its necessities are no part of the Divine Life. If we do, we shall remain where we have always been and there will be no conquest of the external world; nothing abiding there will have been done.

Do people who have advanced very far come back to this plane?

Yes; if there is a will in them to change this plane, then the more advanced they are, the surer they are to come back. And as for those who have the will of running away, even they, when they go over to the other side, may find that the flight was not of much use after all.

Do many remember that they have passed over and are back again?

When you reach a certain state of consciousness, you remember. It is not so difficult to touch this state partially for a short time; in deep meditation, in a dream or a vision one may have the feeling or the impression that he has lived this life before, had this realisation, known these truths. But this is not a full realisation; to come to that, one must have attained to a permanent consciousness within us which is everlasting and holds together all our existences in past or present or future time.

When we are concentrated in mental movements or intellectual pursuits, why do we sometimes forget or lose touch with the Divine?

You lose it because your consciousness is still divided. The Divine has not settled into your mind; you are not wholly consecrated to the Divine Life. Otherwise you could concentrate to any extent upon such things and still you would have the sense of being helped and supported by the Divine.

In all pursuits, intellectual or active, your one motto should be, "Remember and Offer." Let whatever you do be done as an offering to the Divine. And this too will be an excellent discipline for you; it will prevent you from doing many foolish and useless things.

Often in the beginning of the action this can be done; but as one gets engrossed in the work, one forgets. How is one to remember?

The condition to be aimed at, the real achievement of Yoga, the final perfection and attainment, for which all else is only a preparation, is a consciousness in which it is impossible to do anything without the Divine; for then, if you are without the Divine, the very source of your action disappears; knowledge, power, all are gone. But so long as you feel that the powers you use are your own, you will not miss the Divine support.

In the beginning of the Yoga you are apt to forget the Divine very often. But by constant aspiration you increase your remembrance and you diminish the forgetfulness. But this should not be done as a severe discipline or a duty; it must be a movement of love and joy. Then very soon a stage will come when, if you do not feel the presence of the Divine at every moment and whatever you are doing, you feel at once lonely and sad and miserable.

Whenever you find that you can do something without feeling the presence of the Divine and yet be perfectly comfortable, you must understand that you are not consecrated in that part of your being. That is the way of the ordinary humanity which does not feel any need of the Divine. But for a seeker of the Divine Life it is very different. And when you have entirely realised unity with the Divine, then, if the Divine were only for a second to withdraw from you, you would simply drop dead; for the Divine is now the Life of your life, your whole existence, your single and complete support. If the Divine is not there, nothing is left.

In the initial stages of Yoga, is it well for the Sadhak to read ordinary books?

You can read sacred books and yet be far away from the Divine; and you can read the most stupid productions and be in touch with the Divine. It is not possible to get an idea of what the transformed consciousness and its movements are until you have had a taste of the transformation. There is a way of consciousness in union with the Divine in which you can enjoy all you read, as you can all you observe, even the most indifferent books or the most uninteresting things. You can hear poor

music, even music from which one would like to run away, and yet you can, not for its outward self but because of what is behind, enjoy it. You do not lose the distinction between good music and bad music, but you pass through either into that which it expresses. For there is nothing in the world which has not its ultimate truth and support in the Divine. And if you are not stopped by the appearance, physical or moral or aesthetic, but get behind and are in touch with the Spirit, the Divine Soul in things, you can reach beauty and delight even through what affects the ordinary sense only as something poor, painful or discordant.

Can it be said in justification of one's past that whatever has happened in one's life had to happen?

Obviously, what has happened had to happen; it would not have been, if it had not been intended. Even the mistakes that we have committed and the adversities that fell upon us had to be, because there was some necessity in them, some utility for our lives. But in truth these things cannot be explained mentally and should not be. For all that happened was necessary, not for any mental reason, but to lead us to something beyond what the mind imagines. But is there any need to explain after all? The whole universe explains everything at every moment and a particular thing happens because the whole universe is what it is. But this does not mean that we are bound over to a blind acquiescence in Nature's inexorable law. You can accept the past as a settled fact and perceive the necessity in it, and still you can use the experience it gave you to build up the power consciously to guide and shape your present and your future.

Is the time also of an occurrence arranged in the Divine Plan of things?

All depends upon the plane from which one sees and speaks. There is a plane of divine consciousness in which all is known absolutely, and the whole plan of things foreseen and predetermined. That way of seeing lives in the highest reaches of the Supramental; it is the Supreme's own vision. But when we do not possess that consciousness, it is useless to speak in terms that hold good only in that region and are not our present effective way of seeing things. For at a lower level of consciousness nothing is realised or fixed beforehand; all is in the process of making. Here there are no settled facts, there is only the play of possibilities; out of the clash of possibilities is realised the thing that has to happen. On this plane we can choose and select; we can refuse one possibility and accept another; we can follow one path, turn away from another. And that we can do, even though what is actually happening may have been foreseen and predetermined in a higher plane.

The Supreme Consciousness knows everything beforehand, because everything is realised there in her eternity. But for the sake of her play and in order to carry out

actually on the physical plane what is foreordained in her own supreme self, she moves here upon earth as if she did not know the whole story; she works as if it was a new and untried thread that she was weaving. It is this apparent forgetfulness of her own foreknowledge in the higher consciousness that gives to the individual in the active life of the world his sense of freedom and independence and initiative. These things in him are her pragmatic tools or devices, and it is through this machinery that the movements and issues planned and foreseen elsewhere are realised here.

It may help you to understand if you take the example of an actor. An actor knows the whole part he has to play; he has in his mind the exact sequence of what is to happen on the stage. But when he is on the stage, he has to appear as if he did not know anything; he has to feel and act as if he were experiencing all these things for the first time, as if it was an entirely new world with all its chance events and surprises that was unrolling before his eyes.

Is there then no real freedom? Is everything absolutely determined, even your freedom, and is fatalism the highest secret?

Freedom and fatality, liberty and determinism are truths that obtain on different levels of consciousness. It is ignorance that makes the mind put the two on the same level and pit one against the other. Consciousness is not a single uniform reality, it is complex; it is not something like a flat plain, it is multidimensional. On the highest height is the Supreme and in the lowest depth is matter; and there is an infinite gradation of levels of consciousness between this lowest depth and the highest height.

In the plane of matter and on the level of the ordinary consciousness you are bound hand and foot. A slave to the mechanism of Nature, you are tied to the chain of Karma, and there, in that chain, whatever happens is rigorously the consequence of what has been done before. There is an illusion of independent movement, but in fact you repeat what all others do, you echo Nature's world-movements, you revolve helplessly on the crushing wheel of her cosmic machine.

But it need not be so. You can shift your place if you will; instead of being below, crushed in the machinery or moved like a puppet, you can rise and look from above and by changing your consciousness you can even get hold of some handle to move apparently inevitable circumstances and change fixed conditions. Once you draw yourself up out of the whirlpool and stand high above, you see you are free. Free from all compulsions, not only you are no longer a passive instrument, but you become an active agent. You are not only not bound by the consequences of your action, but you can even change the consequences. Once you see the play of forces, once you raise yourself to a plane of consciousness where lie the origins of forces and identify yourself with these dynamic sources, you belong no longer to what is moved but to that which moves.

This precisely is the aim of Yoga, — to get out of the cycle of Karma into a divine movement. By Yoga you leave the mechanical round of Nature in which you are an ignorant slave, a helpless and miserable tool, and rise into another plane where you become a conscious participant and a dynamic agent in the working out of a Higher Destiny. This movement of the consciousness follows a double line. First of all there is an ascension; you raise yourself out of the level of material consciousness into superior ranges. But this ascension of the lower into the higher calls a descent of the higher into the lower. When you rise above the earth, you bring down too upon earth something of the above, — some light, some power that transforms or tends to transform its old nature. And then these things that were distinct, disconnected and disparate from each other — the higher in you and the lower, the inner and the outer strata of your being and consciousness — meet and are slowly joined together and gradually they fuse into one truth, one harmony.

It is in this way that what are called miracles happen. The world is made up of innumerable planes of consciousness and each has its own distinct laws; the laws of one plane do not hold good for another. A miracle is nothing but a sudden descent, a bursting forth of another consciousness and its powers — most often it is the powers of the vital — into this plane of matter. There is a precipitation, upon the material mechanism, of the mechanism of a higher plane. It is as though a lightning flash tore through the cloud of our ordinary consciousness and poured into it other forces, other movements and sequences. The result we call a miracle, because we see a sudden alteration, an abrupt interference with the natural laws of our own ordinary range, but the reason and order of it we do not know or see, because the source of the miracle lies in another plane. Such incursions of the worlds beyond into our world of matter are not very uncommon, they are even a constant phenomenon, and if we have eyes and know how to observe we can see miracles in abundance. Especially must they be constant among those who are endeavouring to bring down the higher reaches into the earth-consciousness below.

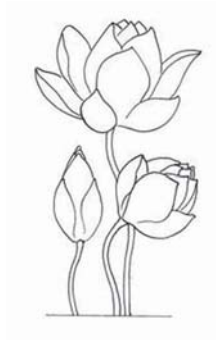
Has creation a definite aim? Is there something like a final end to which it is moving?

No, the universe is a movement that is eternally unrolling itself. There is nothing which you can fix upon as *the* end and one aim. But for the sake of action we have to section the movement, which is itself unending, and to say that this or that is the goal, for in action we need something upon which we can fix our aim. In a picture you need a definite scheme of composition and colour; you have to set a limit, to put the whole thing within a fixed framework; but the limit is illusory, the frame is a mere convention. There is a constant continuation of the picture that stretches beyond any particular frame, and each continuation can be drawn in the same conditions in an unending series of frames. Our aim is this or that, we say, but we know that it is

only the beginning of another aim beyond it, and that in its turn leads to yet another; the series develop always and never stop.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 23-32)



“O LOVE, O LUSTRE”

A poem explained

You must have learned from my letter to X that my recent illness kindled poetry in me at the odd hour of half past eleven one night. One of the results is an appeal to the descending light of the Divine. Here it is:

O Love, O Lustre,
Downward flow —
Now stormy, now tranquil,
But never slow —
For little is our time here,
And it only grows great
If filled by your Splendour’s
Wonderful weight!

Your burden of beauty,
Your smiling power,
Breaks open the secret
Heaven of each hour —
Your reverie presses
Our feet of clay
To grip forever
Some deathless way!

Brim my whole body
Right up to the brain,
Till thy gathering godhead
Flows over to stain,
With hues of rapture
You bring from above,
My outermost manhood —
O Lustre, O Love!

Sounds very simple, eh? Well, it is pretty simple, but you will surely like me to go through it with you, step by step. The first four lines are very clear — in the fifth and sixth there is a piece of what may be called inspired punning which must be understood if we are to get the full significance out of them. You see, I am asking the descending love and lustre never to become slow, for the time we have in hand is

brief. The word “little”, however, means not only brief but also small or wanting in greatness. This shade is picked up in the term “great” which, without violating the first implication, suggests that our life can only be rendered free of the puny human element if the divine light pours into it and fills it with its own weight of power and perfection. There is implied, in addition, the idea special to our yoga, that if the Supramental light completely fills us the frustrating brevity of human life will be replaced by a god-like existence miraculous in its magnitude.

Then the “weight” idea is picked up in the phrase “burden of beauty”, the sense of which is further illumined in “smiling power” — words which make vivid and almost personal the meaning of divine beauty and of its transfiguring blissful compulsion on earth. Now, what does the burden of beauty which is a smiling power do? The burden naturally is so immense that it breaks what it falls on — in this case the time-consciousness; but in breaking the time-consciousness it lays bare what is hidden within that consciousness, the eternal mystery, “the secret/Heaven of each hour”; so, instead of saying “breaks” I say “Breaks open”, a phrase which is apt in connection with the words “smiling power” also, for we speak of someone breaking into a smile, and a smile is really a breaking open of something shut. By its smile, as it were, the divine power discloses the secret that makes a heaven of earthly life. In the next stanza, the luminous disclosure is called “reverie”, and the weight-idea, the burden-theme, is still kept up: hence “Your reverie *presses*”. As soon as there is the compulsive spiritual reverie pressing from above into the physical consciousness, the body is stirred to seeking what it has visioned and our feet tread no longer the dark ignorant path of normal life but grip “Some deathless way”.

The two concluding stanzas emerge by poetic logic, from what has preceded them. We have by now the picture of the spirit’s power descending into the embodied being right down to the feet. I appeal to this power to brim me up wholly. The brimming of anything is, as you must know, the pouring of something from top down to bottom and then the accumulation of that from bottom upwards to top. This accumulation is referred to in the line “Right up to the brain” — and when the whole embodied being is filled, there will be an overflow as from the top of a jar, and the entire outward self is washed in the divine light — the “outermost manhood” is “stained” with the “hues of rapture” that were brought from above into the inner self. Of course, “stain” which is usually a derogatory verb is used here to mean just the making of a strong visible impression in terms of colour, as in Sri Aurobindo’s

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven.

I suppose the poem is quite crystalline to you now; only, let me, in concluding, draw your attention to the felicitous function of the word “godhead” in the line “Till thy gathering godhead”. The divine overflow is from the top — it is visualised as if

from the brain which is the top of the body: is not “godhead”, therefore, most apposite? The repetition, too, of the beginning of the poem, “O Love, O Lustre” in the closing “O Lustre, O Love” suggests the completeness, the entirety, of the descent that is desired, the same divinity at one end as at the other.

I may add that the reversal of the formula at the terminal end is not there just for the sake of a variation. The variation, no doubt, has a refreshing touch but the fact that the last words of the poem, “O Love”, are the same as the first ones ties up the two ends literally and establishes a perfect identity.

Perhaps the magic of the poem is somewhat dimmed when the logic of it is thus worked out to a comprehensible clarity. But I have taken the risk in order to alert you to the fact that all poetical magic has a poetical logic of its own. Only, the latter has to be intuitively grasped and need not be intellectually analysed.

4 August 1938

[Version from *The Secret Splendour* —
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 546:]

O Love, O Lustre,
 Downward flow —
 Now stormy, now tranquil,
 But never slow —
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 If filled by your splendour’s
 Wonderful weight.

Your burden of beauty,
 Your smiling power
 Breaks open the secret
 Heaven of each hour —
 Your reverie presses
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 To grip forever
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 Right up to the brain
 Till the gathering godhead

Flows over to stain,
 With hues of rapture
 You bring from above,
 My outermost manhood —
 O Lustre, O Love!

1946

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

(Reprinted from *Mother India*, August 1985, pp. 529-31, with additional matter)

Only a few, the rare aristocrats of the earth, can really and truly think. That is now the true aristocracy, not the aristocracy of the body and birth, not the aristocracy of vital superiority, wealth, pride and luxury, not the aristocracy of higher emotions, courage, energy, successful political instinct and the habit of mastery and rule, — though these latter cannot be neglected, — but the aristocracy of knowledge, undisturbed insight and intellectual ability.

Sri Aurobindo

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 436)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of June 2015)

Chapter: XLIV

“Emperor vs. Arabindo Ghose and Others”

My own experience in India leads me to think that repressive measures, if they are to succeed, must be swift and summary. The long-protracted inquiry, the cross-examination of the defence, and the daily spectacle of the accused coming to and leaving the Court are a huge attraction for the crazy youth of India. The procedure should be swift, summary and secret.

Field Marshal Earl Roberts to Lord Minto
30 June 1908¹

Never before had the two parallel aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s life become as conspicuous as now. While the world outside the high walls around the Alipore Jail buzzed with news, rumours, interpretations and concerns for those arrested and for Sri Aurobindo in particular, Sri Aurobindo himself was absorbed deep within himself, as if unaware of his environment. We will come to this inner aspect of his life, whatever he has revealed, later. Let us continue to focus on the external happenings.

In his charming handling of his mother tongue which he had by then sufficiently mastered to convey tender sarcasm and blatant satire as well as reflections on most serious issues, he vividly describes the treatment meted out to him in his 9 x 5 feet solitary cell, its miniature foreyard ending behind a wooden door. Through a tiny hole in the door the sentries could violate a hapless prisoner’s privacy at any time. And each time a sentry would be replaced by another, which happened at regular intervals at night, the newcomer with his hoarse shout would elicit from the prisoner a docile response, — the latter thus being obliged to start up from his sleep.

What Sri Aurobindo wrote about the luxuries his host, the British-India Government, bestowed on him — and the way he expressed it in Bengali — would defy any attempt at an accurate rendering into English. Unique indeed was the narration’s native flavour. Here is an extract from the best available translation:

Such was the place where we were lodged. As for fittings our generous authorities had left nothing to be desired so far as our hospitable reception was concerned. One plate and bowl used to adorn the courtyard. Properly washed

and cleaned, my self-sufficing plate and bowl shone like silver, it was the solace of my life. In its impeccable, glowing radiance in the 'heavenly kingdom', in that symbol of immaculate British imperialism, I used to enjoy the pure bliss of loyalty to the Crown. Unfortunately, the plate too shared in the bliss, and if one pressed one's fingers a little hard on its surface it would start flying in a circle, like the whirling dervishes of Arabia. And then one had to use one hand for eating while the other held the plate in position. Else, while whirling, it would attempt to slip away with the incomparable grub provided by the prison authorities. But more dear and useful than the plate was the bowl. Among inert objects it was like the British civilian. Just as the civilian *ipso facto* is fit and able to undertake any administrative duty, be it as judge, magistrate, police, revenue officer, chairman of municipality, professor, preacher, whatever you ask him to do he can become at your merest bidding — just as for him to be an investigator, complainant, police magistrate, even at times to be the counsel for defence, all these roles hold a friendly concourse in the same hospitable body, my dear bowl was equally multi-purpose. The bowl was free from all caste restrictions, beyond discrimination: in the prison cell it helped in the act of ablution; later with the same bowl I gargled, bathed; a little later when I had to take my food, the lentil soup or vegetable soup was poured into the same container; I drank water out of it and washed my mouth. Such an all-purpose priceless object can be had only in a British prison. Serving all my worldly needs the bowl became an aid in my spiritual discipline too. Where else could I find such an aid and preceptor to get rid of the sense of disgust? After the first spell of solitary imprisonment was over, when we were allowed to stay together, civilian's rights were bifurcated, and the authorities arranged for another receptacle for the privy. But for one month I acquired an unsought lesson in controlling my sense of disgust. The entire procedure for defecation seems to have been oriented towards the art of self-control. Solitary imprisonment, it has been said, must be counted as a special form of punishment and its guiding principle the avoidance of human company and the open sky. To arrange this ablution in the open or outside would mean a violation of that principle; hence two baskets, with tar coating, would be kept in the room itself. The sweeper (*methar*) would clean it up in the mornings and afternoons. In case of intense agitation and heart-warming speeches from our side the cleaning would be done at other times too. But if one went to the privy at odd hours, as penance one had to put up with the noxious and fetid smell. In the second chapter of our solitary confinement there were some reforms in this respect, but British reforms keep the old principles intact while making minor changes in administration. Needless to say, because of all this arrangement in a small room, one had throughout to undergo considerable inconvenience, especially at meal times and during the night. Attached bathrooms are, I know, oftentimes

a part of western culture, but to have, in a small cell, a bedroom, dining room and w.c. rolled into one — this is what is called too much of a good thing! We Indians are full of regrettable customs, it is painful for us to be so highly civilised.²

Sri Aurobindo was provided with a bucket which a neighbouring prisoner had been ordered to fill with water for his washing and bath; but the potable water stored in a tin pot grew hot — it was the month of May — and as he drank small quantities of it his thirst grew more and more severe and demanding. It took days for him to obtain an earthen vessel.

There was no scope for any breeze visiting his room, except when accompanied by rains or storm that left his floor flooded, but heat and sun singed the room thoroughly and Sri Aurobindo felt he was living in an oven. He had been given two jail-made blankets, but no pillow.

The first day in prison passed off peacefully. It was all so new as to be almost gay. Comparing it with the Lal Bazar lock-up I felt happy with my present circumstances, and since I had faith in God the loneliness did not weigh heavily on me. Even the strange spectacle of prison diet failed to disturb my attitude — coarse rice, even that spiced with husk, pebbles, insects, hair, dirt and such other stuff; tasteless lentil soup heavily watered; vegetables and greens mixed with grass and leaves. I never knew before that food could be so tasteless and without any nutritive value. Looking at its melancholy black visage I was appalled; and after two mouthfuls with a respectful salaam I took leave of it. All prisoners receive the same diet, and once a course gets going it goes on for ever. Then it was the Reign of Herbs. Days, fortnights and months passed by, but the same herbs (*shāk*), lentil and rice went on unchanged. What to speak of changing the menu, the preparation was not changed a jot or little; it was the same immutable, Eternal from beginning to end, a stable unique thing-in-itself. Within two evenings it was calculated to impress upon the prisoner the fragility of this world of maya. But even here I was luckier than the rest, this was because of the doctor's kindness. He had arranged a supply of milk from the hospital, thanks to which I had been spared on certain days from the vision of *shāk*. . . .³

Nothing can give us a better taste of what offered than the prisoner's own account of it:

A little later *lufsi* was served at my doorstep; that day I did not take it but had only a vision of what it looked like. It was after a few days that I had the first taste of the 'great dish'. *Lufsi*, boiled rice, along with water, is the prisoner's

little breakfast. A trinity, it takes three forms. On the first day it was *lufsi* in its Wisdom aspect, unmixed, original element, pure, white Shiva. On the second, it was the Hiranyagarbha aspect, boiled along with lentils, called *khichuri*, a yellowish medley. On the third day *lufsi* appeared in its aspect of Virat, a little mixed with jaggery, grey, slightly more fit for human consumption. I had thought the Wisdom and the Hiranyagarbha aspects to be beyond the capacity of average humanity and therefore made no efforts in that direction, but once in a while I had forced some of the Virat stuff within my system and marvelled, in delightful muse, about the many-splendoured virtues of British rule and the high level of western humanitarianism. It should be added that *lufsi* was the only nutritious diet for the Bengali prisoners, the rest were without any food value. But what of that? It had a taste, and one could eat this only out of sheer hunger; even then, one had to force and argue with oneself to be able to consume that stuff. . . .

Meanwhile some of the government officials totally faithful to their salt were unreservedly exercising the art of flattery and lies. They seemed to have graduated to influence some of their prisoners to make voluntary confessions of their deeds, promising them favourable treatment as well as leniency in the measures of punishment. Their targets included even Sri Aurobindo. As Nolini Kanta Gupta recollected:

The police had on more than one occasion suggested to Sri Aurobindo, in order that he might feel flattered or perhaps even get excited and be moved to act according to their wishes, that a strong and truthful and straightforward man like him could certainly not adopt a false pose or act in secret; that he had the courage to do openly whatever he considered to be his duty or the right thing to do; that he would never care to run away and hide himself; and that whatever he did he would frankly acknowledge and say without hesitation, "Yes, it is I who have done it". But Sri Aurobindo was not to be trapped like that. He held that far more important than any question of personal honour or indignities, or a parading of one's capacity or virtue, was the work to be done and its success. He would cite the example of Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata story; Sri Krishna had no intention of being caught by Jarasandha and he fled to Dwarka in order to make ready for the adversary. That is why Sri Aurobindo did not consider a retreat to be a bad thing always. "We live to fight another day": this should be the motto of the soldier. That is why he left standing instructions with Barin and his group that they were not to admit anything immediately they were caught by the police. They should keep their mouths shut and make whatever statements were necessary only when the time came at a later stage. It is however true that Barin and some of the senior members of

the group did make a full confession soon after their arrest. But they did that purposely, with a view to save the party by the sacrifice of some of its members. They had hoped that by taking on themselves all the responsibility, the others might be proved to have been innocent, so that instead of all of us dying together, some might still live on to carry the work forward.⁴

All the circumstantial evidence established the fact that Barindra Kumar really trusted the government officials who pretended to be not only his well-wishers but also admirers. Surely, to save his own skin was far from Barindra Kumar's concern. He would like to be recognised as the prime mover of the revolution that was aborted while in the making and would welcome the ultimate punishment for himself, but the authorities must accept his assertion that the other members of his team were merely his followers and must be looked upon as innocents who did not know what they were doing! He was so convinced of the soundness of his strategy that he tried his best to convince Hemchandra Das, the Europe-returned bomb-maker, to follow his path. Stubbornly clinging to his policy, he even got annoyed with Hem when the latter told him that Sri Aurobindo was absolutely against cooperating with the foe through confessions and all that.⁵

However, it did not seem to have taken very long for the illusion nurtured by Barindra Kumar and those inspired by him to begin dissolving. Now some of them, of course with the indefatigable Barindra Kumar as the protagonist once again, played with the idea of a grand jailbreak. More than one plan had been made. In one of them they had made a detailed draft of the *modus operandi* of their escape into the Vindhyachal, thence to Kabul and thereafter to Persia. The outside collaborators had been provided with a list of items that would be necessary for a successful operation.⁶

For an authentic account of the finalised plan for the proposed adventure, we turn to Nolini Kanta Gupta:

... and what next? Must we rot in jail for the rest of our lives, say for ten years or perhaps twenty? And supposing some of us were to be hanged, that too did not seem to be a particularly desirable end. Barin got an idea: we must break out of jail. Our lives, he argued, were going to be wasted in any case, so why not do something worthwhile before we lost all? He consulted some of the others and began to form his plans. Even maps and charts were got ready and contacts were established with co-workers outside, such as the Chandernagore group with men like Srish Ghosh at the top. The idea was to carry out the *coup* sometime in the evening when we were usually left at large in the open compound of our ward. With pistols in hand, we were to rush to the compound wall. Our friends would be posted outside with their arms. From there they would throw in ropes and ladders. We would keep on shooting as we climbed

up the wall and then jump on to the other side. From there we would make good our escape in carriages — there were no cars then — along a route fixed in advance and straight to the riverside. There the boats would be waiting. We would sail down the river and on to the Sunderbans and the deep jungle, as in the story of *Debi Chowdhurani* of Bankim.

There were many who could not approve of this romantic plan of Barin. But I was one of the small fry and was prepared to obey orders, whatever they might be. For it had been part of our ideal in life:

Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die

...

Sri Aurobindo however refused to have anything to do with Barin's plans. "As far as I am concerned," he said, "I mean to stand the trial."⁷

On the 18th of May 1908 the prisoners were led to the court of Mr. Birley, Magistrate, Alipore. The gentleman was quite anxious to try the case that was the talk of the town. The massive quantity of documents the police had collected, apart from the gala feast of confessions with which Barindra Kumar and his lieutenants had entertained the prosecutors, had made him very hopeful that it would be a wonderful prospect for him to preside over the trial and nip a revolution in the bud and go down in history as a big defender of the Empire.

A large crowd greeted the prisoners on their arrival in front of the court, to the dismay of the police and the judge. Sri Aurobindo observed that he alone had his slippers on whereas his compatriots were barefooted. He immediately removed his slippers. An impressive police force restrained the mob from rushing forward towards the prisoners.

After a few stern warnings to the public to behave, the trial of the case designated "Emperor vs. Arabindo Ghose and Others" began. A report from *The Bengalee* of that vital first day in the court:

The case against Mr. Aurobindo Ghose and others came up for hearing yesterday at 1 p.m. before Mr. L. Birley, officiating District Magistrate, Alipore. Mr. Eardley Norton, assisted by Mr. Barton, instructed by Mr. Upton, represented the Crown, while Babu Nilkanta Chakravarty appeared for Mr. Aurobindo Ghose. . . .

At first 26 accused were brought into court in the prisoners' vans, including Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, under a strong guard of armed policemen, European sergeants and police officers. The prisoners were all clad in clean clothes. Amongst them Ullaskar Dutta had his yellow 'dhoti' and 'chaddar' on and another accused wore a red 'tusser dhoti'. Mr. Aurobindo Ghose and his brother

had put on 'dhoti' and twill shirt. A young prisoner had only his 'dhoti', a part of which he had used to cover his body with. As for the mood of the prisoners, they were all in remarkable high spirit. Ullaskar was always smiling and this time, unlike on the last occasion at the police court, he did not rest content with enjoying the smile by himself. He cheered up others also. The prisoners, in fact, talked all the time with one another. . . . The prisoners were arranged in two lines, Barindra Ghose being placed at the head of the first line while his elder brother, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, was put at the head of the second line. A press man observed that though the accused were talking with one another, Mr. Aurobindo and Barindra, though very near each other, were not found talking. Yes, this was so only until towards the end of the day's proceedings when Mr. Aurobindo was found by his brother napping. Barindra at once woke him up and the two brothers held a short talk, both smiling all the while. The proceedings went on till 5 p.m. The prisoners got tired of standing and some of them actually sat down. A pleader on behalf of the prisoners, towards the close of the proceedings, prayed that the Magistrate might allow him and others — pleaders and friends of the accused — to treat them to fruits. Mr. Birley did not agree, his objection being there was none to examine these fruits. To this the inexorable pleader said that the fruits might be given to them within the view of the police. Even to this Mr. Birley objected saying that there was none to certify as to the fruits being safely edible. Yet the pleader would not let the matter drop. He said the fruits might be obtained of the police officers themselves, of course at the cost of the prisoners' friends! Still the Magistrate objected. But while all this pleading was going on, the prisoners seemed to get annoyed, specially when the pleader went on beseeching the Magistrate for the favour, prayed for in a plaintive tone. Some of the prisoners wanting water to drink, the magistrate granted the prayer and the accused drank 'aqua pure' to their hearts' content. . . .⁸

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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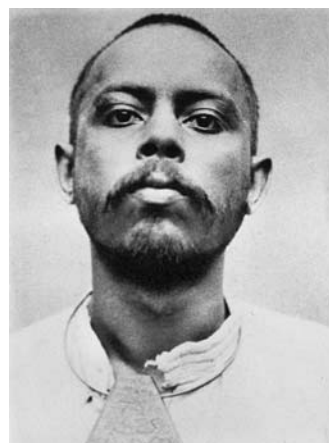
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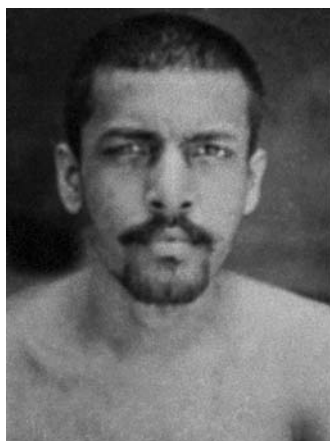
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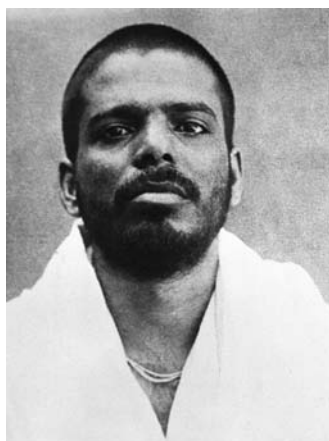
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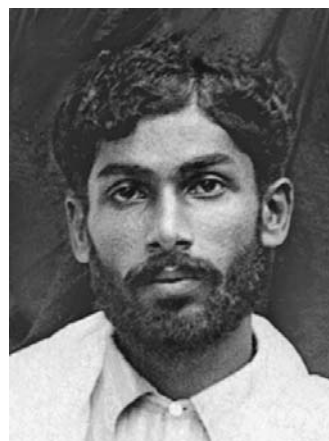
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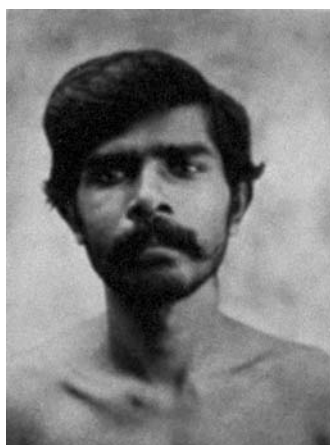
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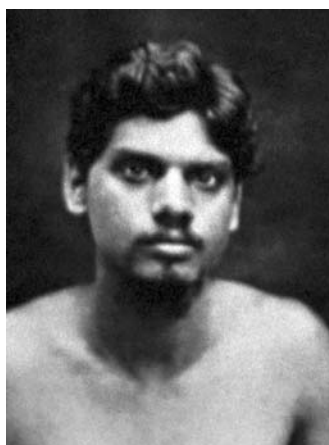
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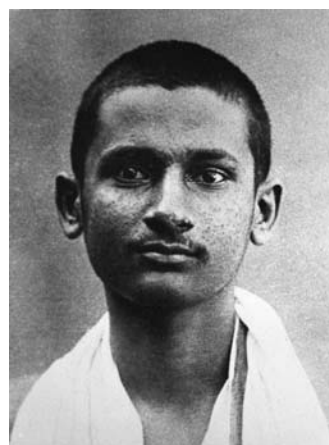
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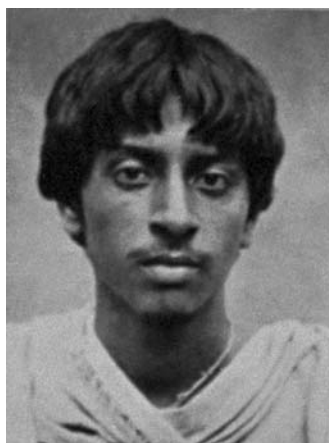
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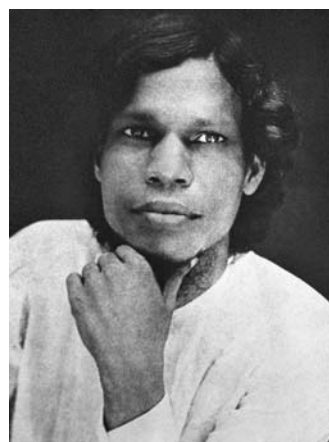
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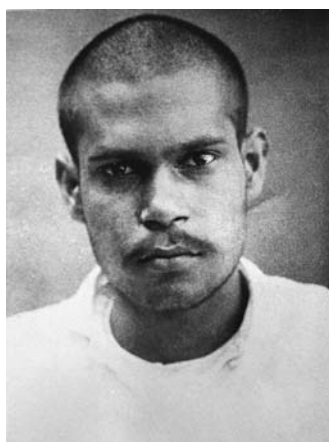
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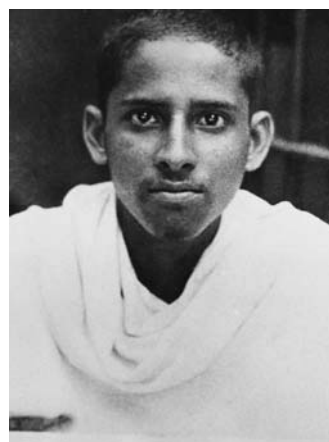
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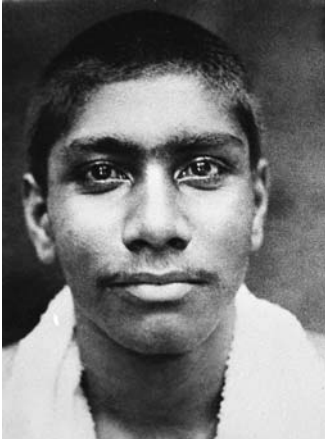
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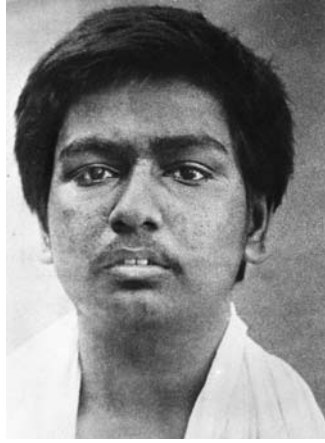
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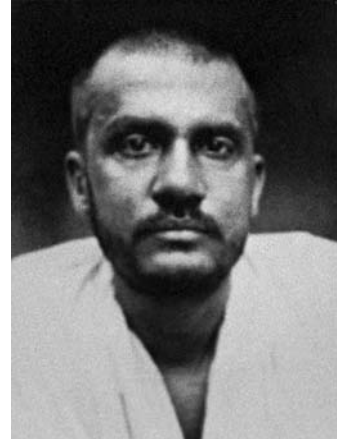
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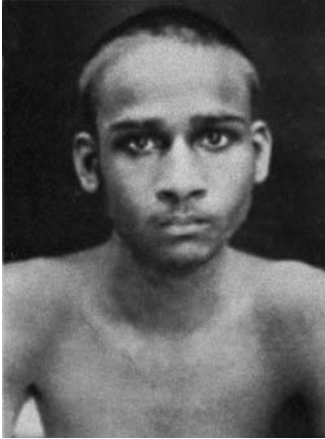
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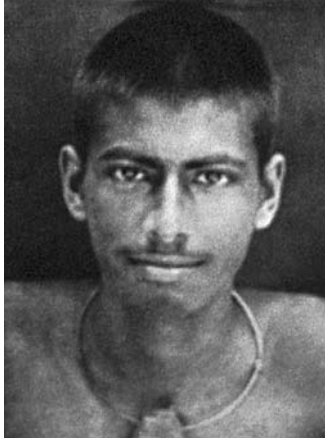
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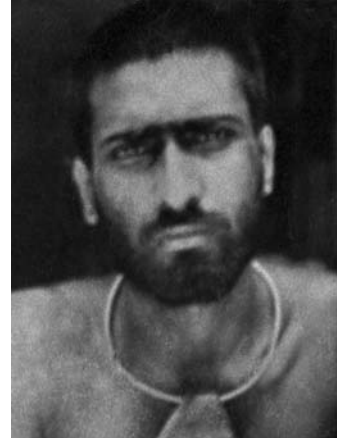
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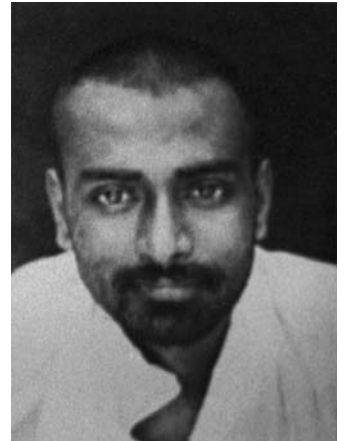
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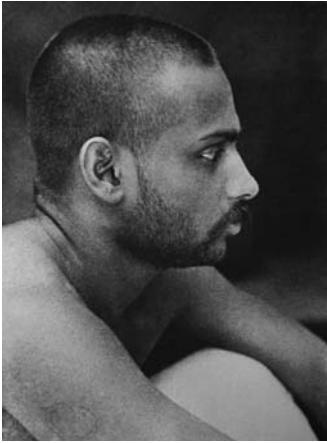
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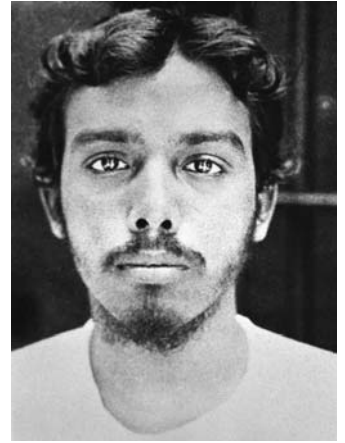
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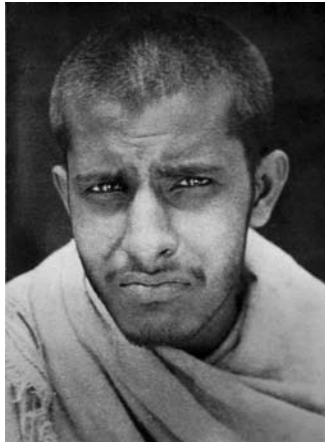
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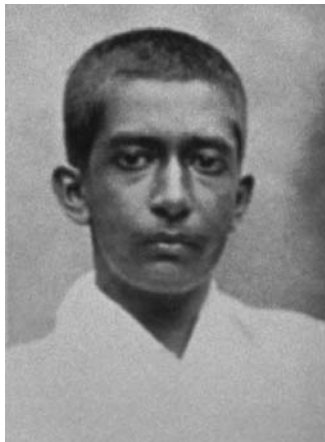
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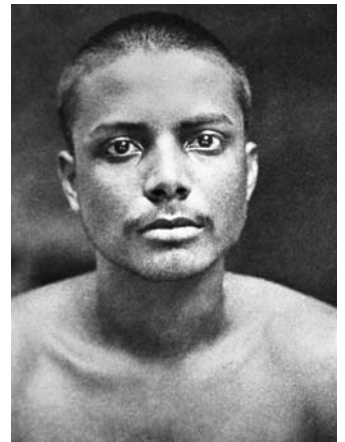
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Din Dayal Bose



Sachindra Kumar Sen



Indu Bhusan Roy

DID HOMER INFLUENCE VYASA?

(A Book Review)

[Fernando Wulff Alonso: *Mahabharata and Greek Mythology*, translated by Andrew Morrow, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel, Motilal Banarsidass, 523 pages, Rs. 1495/-]

The Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee collection in the National Library contains a rare book by an East India Company officer arguing that the *Ramayana* story was strongly influenced by the *Iliad*, knowledge of which had been disseminated in India with the Greek invasion. This was nothing new. In the 2nd century AD, Dios Chrysostom (40-120 AD), mentioned the existence of a translation of the *Iliad* in India reiterated a couple of centuries later by Claudius Aelianus (e.g. the Trojan horse becomes Bhasa's wooden elephant in *Pratigya Yaugandharayana*). In 1871 Weber claimed that the *Ramayana* was merely Buddhist legends grafted on to borrowings from Homer, an argument strongly refuted by W. T. Telang. Weber was refuting M. H. Fauche's proposition (supported by A. Lillie in 1912) that Homer had used the *Ramayana* as a guide. Modern scholars did not take this seriously. Now, a Spanish professor of ancient history in the University of Malaga has carried out an extensive comparison of the *Mahabharata* (MBH) with the *Iliad*, building up a strong case for the Greek influence on thematic and stylistic grounds. The volume is the first in the "Hindu Tradition Series" with Johannes Bronkhorst, emeritus professor of Sanskrit at Lausanne University, as general editor.

Alonso's hypothesis is that in the post-Alexander period the MBH composers used "an extensive index of Hellenistic materials" systematically, beginning with the *Iliad*'s framework of the massacre of heroes at the behest of gods. He discounts N. J. Allen's suggestion that the similarities between Arjuna and Odysseus stem from an older Indo-European narrative tradition. Yet, he traces in the archery contest for Draupadi and for Penelope over 40 close parallels that suggest a common Indo-European paradigm. Emily West has compared Homer's Nausicaa and Chitrangada, single princesses with a married wandering hero. Weber had cited Odysseus' archery feat to win Penelope as having influenced the archery contests of Rama and Arjuna to win Sita and Draupadi, ignoring the fact that Rama breaks the bow and Arjuna does not massacre rivals with it. Josette Lallemand's 1959 study argued for the MBH having influenced the *Aeneid*, which George Duckworth supported, arguing in 1961 that the portrayal of Turnus was based upon Duryodhana. Then, in 1968 Dumezil put forward his theory of an Indo-European tri-functional ideology well illustrated in the MBH where the Pandavas depict this: the dharma-king, the warrior, the grooms.

Alonso sees the MBH as a watershed embodying the formation of post-Vedic “Hinduism” as a reaction against Buddhism and Jainism, propagating Krishna-ite worship (as also of Shiva, which Alonso overlooks). The “discovery” of Brahmi script in Ashoka’s time is a signal development in the oral Vedic tradition, with Krishna Dvaipayana “Vyasa”, the arranger, editing the Vedas into a final form. Several scholars like Bechert and Von Simon have situated the development of Sanskrit in this period *c.* 2nd century BC. This is also when sculpted images appear. The Greco-Roman world is interacting with India at least since the time of Darius I (*cf.* Herodotus), and certainly post-Alexander. Evidence of this is the Bactrian Margiana Archaeological Complex in and around Afghanistan connecting Central Asia with Iran and India and, after Alexander, with the Mediterranean. Ashoka’s Edict XIII mentions embassies to Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and Epirus. His bilingual (Greek and Aramaic) and Greek Edicts exist. When Rome conquered the Greek kingdoms of Egypt and Bactria by the end of the 1st century BC, trade connections between that empire and India were established which persisted through the Kushan rule till the 3rd century AD. Roman trade routes reached the mouth of the Ganga *en route* Southeast Asia and China. “Yavana” is a word signifying all Mediterranean people. The *Bhavishya Purana* mentions Indian communities in “Misra” (Egypt), the MBH mentions Rome in the *Sabha Parva*, and Roman coins have been found at several archaeological sites. Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is about a voyage to India to engage local sages in philosophical debate. The Greco-Roman influence on art, astrology (*Yavanajataka*, *Romakasiddhanta*) shows the veneration in which Yavanas were held in India. Alonso claims that Greek fables were used extensively, and terms like “yavanika” show the influence of Greek drama. A Greek inscription in Kandahar authored by an Indian name (Sophitos, son of Naratos) uses the opening verses of the *Odyssey* for his own woeful adventures.

Alonso notes as many as 97 major points of interconnection between Greek myth and the MBH, beginning with the outer framework itself. Earlier M. L. West and Burkert had established the influence of the Near Eastern tradition, such as *Gilgamesh*, on Homer. Alonso takes his cue from A. Manguel’s finding that an indigenous Colombian community found that the *Iliad* paralleled their own story of a country torn by war imposed by gods for unknown reasons. From there, however, he perhaps goes overboard in asserting that Hinduism’s foundations lie in the encounters between different peoples adopting one another’s cultural legacies and religious concepts.

In both the *Iliad* and the MBH it is the gods who plan the holocaust of proliferating power-drunk rulers to relieve the burden of the earth and usher in a new age. Losses are exceptionally heavy on both sides — Trojans and Achaeans, Kauravas and Pandavas — across the board, from the very young to the ancient. There is, however, a major difference that Alonso fails to tackle. In Homer (*Iliad* and *Cypria*) and Hesiod, Zeus manipulates the gods deviously to shift the balance

of battle every day. In Vyasa, the gods do not intervene in the 18 days of war at all, except that all the decisive moves are the avatar Krishna's. The dharma-protector also engineers the massacre of his own clan. There is an interesting parallel, however: long before the Trojan War, Zeus destroyed almost all mankind by a flood. Before Kurukshetra was a similar annihilation of Kshatriyas in 21 battles towards the end of the *Treta* yuga by another avatar, Parashurama. Moreover, the massacres are doubled in the same era. The Theban War (*cf.* the lost *Thebaid*) in which Diomedes and Sthenelus took part precedes the Trojan War. Similarly, the Kurukshetra fratricide precedes the Prabhasa internecine massacre.

Alonso quotes (p. 158) Sanjaya speaking to Dhritarashtra (*Sabha Parva*, section 72) of the gods making a person mad first, whom they wish to defeat, which could as well have been spoken by Agamemnon. Parallel to gods espousing opposing camps in Homer, in Vyasa the devas incarnate as the Pandavas, Krishna and their allies, while the asuras take possession of Kaurava heroes who are simultaneously incarnations of devas. As Zeus favours now one side then the other in battle, so Shiva empowers both Arjuna (with Pashupata) and Ashvatthama (with a sword), besides being responsible for the gratuitous introduction of Draupadi (Drupada had not asked for a daughter), the rebirth of Amba as Shikhandi, the hundred sons of Gandhari and the incarnations of the five Indras as the Pandavas. The avatar Parashurama gives weapons to the Kaurava heroes Bhishma, Drona and Karna. As Homer's gods fight one another, so Indra and Surya stand on opposite sides behind their sons. Devas and gods provide opponents with special armour and weapons.

Alonso fails to notice that this is no evidence of borrowing but is a carrying forward of a Vedic motif. In the *Rig Veda* Indra shatters the wheel of Surya's chariot. In the *Ramayana*, Surya's son Sugriva has Indra's son Vali killed by Vishnu's avatar Rama. In the MBH, Indra's son Arjuna kills Surya's son Karna at the behest of Vishnu's avatar Krishna.

In both epics heroes are born of intercourse between devas and humans but, unlike Zeus, Indra plays no major role other than depriving Karna of his divine armour and earrings. Alonso argues that Zeus' role and that of Athena in the fall of Troy and in the *Odyssey* are paralleled by Krishna as "supernatural authority". However, as Bankimchandra Chatterjee had shown long back (1886), in the epic Krishna is overwhelmingly human, not supernatural, except in interpolated miraculous episodes. Homer has no parallel to the "supernatural authority" Krishna being slain by a wandering tribal.

The gods of Homer and Vyasa do not perpetrate the massacres, but use human failings on both sides to bring these about. Krishna's manoeuvres leave the Pandava side guilt-ridden, facing consequent heavy losses, just as the adharmic conduct of the Kauravas and the Vrishnis heaps upon them curses from various quarters. A mighty female supernaturally born is the direct cause of the wars: Helen, Zeus' sole mortal daughter and Draupadi, born from the sacrificial altar. On their opposing

sides are half-god Achilles and Vasu-incarnate Bhishma. As Paris gazes on three naked goddesses with hubris, so does Mahabhisha on Ganga as the breeze uplifted her dress. Both face tragic consequences. Thetis, mother of Achilles, and Ganga, mother of Bhishma, are water goddesses who leave their husbands after giving birth to the hero and being stopped by the mortal spouse from drowning the child. The Aphrodite-Anchises story is very similar: the son Aeneas is taken away by the goddess and returned later like Achilles and Bhishma. Neither hero marries. Both are the chief warriors of their armies, yet subject to lesser mortals who are kings. The refusals of both exacerbate the war. After a decisive victory in the day, both receive clandestine visits from the opposite camp, each time accompanied by a god (Hermes with Priam and Krishna with the Pandavas). The visit occurs at the end of the ninth year/ninth day. Both die in the tenth year/tenth day. Just as Apollo stands behind Paris guiding his arrow to kill Achilles, so Arjuna shoots from behind Shikhandi to fell Bhishma. Both heroes are overshadowed by an awareness of their tragic destiny. Ganga's lament at Bhishma's death has exact parallels in the *Iliad*. Agamemnon and Duryodhana both insult their generals and defy supernatural powers; both commit serious offences against women (Briseis, Draupadi). In the latter case, there are two successive interventions and what is said by the first messenger is couched in very similar terms. In both cases, a god intervenes invisibly (Athena, Krishna) after intervention by an elder fails (Nestor, Vidura). The commanders-in-chief of both Achaeans (Agamemnon) and Pandavas (Dhrishtadyumna) have similarities: both are murdered soon after victory, defenceless (drowned, suffocated); both are closely linked to the heroine (Helen, Draupadi). Their fathers lose their kingdoms to a brother (Atreus to Thyestes) or a close friend (Drupada to Drona). The child born for taking vengeance succeeds and is named after an animal (goat-Aegisthos, horse-Ashvatthama). Both Hector and Duryodhana wear impenetrable armour, flee, and are killed because of a trick by a god (Athena, Krishna) and their fallen bodies are maltreated by the victor. Achilles and Duryodhana are devastated by the deaths of their closest friends, Patroclus and Karna, both of whom initially withdraw from the battlefield. Both Patroclus and Karna are deprived of their birthright and later regain royalty. Both lose the divine armour that protects them because of a god's trick (Apollo, Indra) and die because they target the chief warrior of the opposing army (Hector, Arjuna). They ignore the warning given to them, have problems with their chariots in battle, die defenceless rebuking their slayer. Immediately after their death, the charioteer drives off. Both Achilles and Krishna die being shot in the foot. Both Patrocles and Krishna leave instructions about their obsequies with their closest friend (Achilles, Arjuna).

In the *Thebaid*, Diomedes' father Tydeus eats the brains of Melanippus, as Bhima drinks Duhshasana's blood. Curses cause the deaths of the heroes in Thebes and Dvaraka. Both cities, said to be impregnable, are demolished (as are Troy and the Achaean encampment) and the women (of Troy and Dvaraka) abducted. In

both cases a group of seven heroes are involved. With the Pandavas, Krishna and Satyaki make 7. But Alonso is mistaken in stating that Kritavarma leads a group of 7 kings on the Kaurava side. He merely leads the Yadava contingent. The kings of Thebes and Hastinapura are blind. Their mothers are widows impregnated by a close relative of the husband. In both, exiled heroes gain allies through marriage and in both peace embassies fail and fratricidal war results.

Both Priam and Dhritarashtra are aged, do not fight, have numerous sons whom they survive and a son who betrays them (Helenus, Yuyutsu) and is involved in their obsequies. Ominous portents attend the births of Paris and Duryodhana. However, Priam discards Paris, while Dhritarashtra refuses to kill Duryodhana. Their conduct is supported by the fathers. The god Dionysus blesses Apollo's son Anius, king of Delos, with an unending supply of food through his three daughters which the Achaeans need for the nine years of siege. Surya gifts Yudhishtira an inexhaustible cooking pot for the period of exile. In both cases there is an ordained period before which the war cannot occur (9-10 years for Thebes and Troy; 13 for Kurukshetra; 36 for Dvaraka). Both wars end with massacres at night of sleeping soldiers and non-combatants. In the raid at night by Odysseus and Diomedes, they are helped by Athena. Ashvatthama, Kritavarma and Kripa are helped by Rudra. The killer has just one conversation with one of the victims who is immobilised (Diomedes with Dolon, Ashvatthama with Dhrishtadyumna), and then butchers the rest. In both, the same character plays a critical role in the massacres: Diomedes at Thebes and Troy, along with Odysseus in the latter, and Kritavarma at Kurukshetra and at Prabhasa along with Satyaki and Krishna. In Troy and Kurukshetra, the final massacre occurs through incursion by a "horse". Just as the wooden horse bears within it the killers, so Ashvatthama carries with him ghouls who devour the camp-dwellers. In Dvaraka the cause is a similar ruse (feigned pregnancy) that births the mortal club. Bellerophon and Ashvatthama receive divine gifts which they misuse and are struck down to wander in perpetual anguish.

Dhrishtadyumna and Athena are born fully grown, armoured, with chariots, roaring. Draupadi, Helen and Pandora are agents of the gods for destruction on earth and are irresistible beauties. Their violators are first humiliated and then destroyed. Alcmaeon, the leader of the assault on Thebes, is guilty of matricide like Parashurama at his father's behest, and, like him, is forgiven. Both have to leave the known earth and dwell in a newly formed land. The fathers of both are holy men who are decapitated.

Helen has three husbands; Draupadi has five. Each very harshly berates one husband, who withdraws from battle. Then a more powerful brother visits him, having left the field to enquire after him, draws a weapon, violently criticises his withdrawal and for lying in bed, gets reconciled and returns to the battle. Helen has twin brothers, the Dioscuri, linked to horses. The name of one of them, Castor, means "beaver". Draupadi has twin husbands: Nakula means mongoose. With his

twin Sahadeva they groom horses and cattle. Pollux refuses immortality, preferring to share his brother's fate in hell. Yudhishtira does the same. Like Heracles, accompanied by a divine herald, he rescues his wife and brothers from hell. Menelaus and Yudhishtira are both not notable warriors, indecisive, not spiteful unlike their brothers who criticise him referring to violence against his wife. Agamemnon announces that they will return home if Menelaus is killed. For similar reasons, Duryodhana plots the death or imprisonment of Yudhishtira.

Alonso draws parallels between Heracles (half-divine, losing kingship as Eurystheus' birth is prematurely induced) and Yudhishtira (half-divine, not winning initially though Duryodhana's birth is delayed). In both cases there is an internecine rivalry in a dynasty with supernatural origins, a supernatural intervention affects the delivery and decides the balance of power, and the excessive desire of one of the child's parents boomerangs. The half-divine sons lose their rights to rivals who appear in a jar (Eurystheus hides in one; Duryodhana is pot-born). The hero's father is exiled from the kingdom, commits a crime related to animals, is prohibited access to his wife. During the exile the hero is born by a god's intervention, which the father accepts. The hero's uncle and his son deprive him of his birth-right. His mother has to live for long in the kingdom of his rival. The hero suffers a temporary madness (Heracles kills wife and children; Yudhishtira gets obsessed with dicing) because of which he has to travel through wild, distant places, having many adventures (12 labours; 12 years of exile), and undergoes humiliating servitude in disguise for one year, living like a woman in a palace subject to a queen/princess (Heracles with Queen Omphale; Achilles among women in Scyros; Arjuna with princess Uttara). This ends with the defeat of an enemy who attacks that kingdom for cattle and restoration of true identity and weapons and a marital union which propagates the dynasty (Heracles and Arjuna pass on the bride to their direct descendants). This is followed by vengeful extermination of the enemy in war. There are a large number of parallels in the Heracles-Omphale episode including characters/weapons tied to a tree, a supernatural bow, a corpse linked to the change of names. Statues of Heracles and of Bhima are destroyed by one in darkness/blindness fooled into thinking it is a person and is injured thereby.

There are other parallels with Greek myths. In the *Ramayana*, like Icarus and Daedalus, Sampati and Jatayu fly, and the former falls by the sea flying up too near the sun. Both Jatayu and Daedalus are involved with a male and a female travelling together (Ravana-Sita; Theseus-Ariadne). In both the woman suffers and the persecution ends with the killing of the tyrant (Minos/Ravana) who rules over an island. Both Heracles and Bhima are gourmands and cooks, prefer to fight with bare hands or primitive weapons and kill a tyrant who abuses a woman (Faunus-Omphale, Kichaka-Draupadi). Poseidon and Apollo, condemned to serving Laomedon, have to build the ramparts of Troy and tend his cattle and then the horses of Admetus. The herds wax. Nakula-Sahadeva tending Virata's cattle and

horses is an exact parallel. Ovid's version of the Faunus-Omphale-Heracles story yields numerous parallels with the Kichaka-Draupadi-Bhima episode. Both occur during a religious festival, there is reference to drinking and eating, the violent ardour of the villain, the hero dressing as a woman, the encounter takes place in the dark. Alonso makes a laboured attempt to equate Heracles' killing Busiris and his attendants who shackled him for sacrifice with Bhima killing Kichaka's henchmen who try to sacrifice Draupadi. He points out that she is described as standing embracing a column, which is peculiar unless one recalls Heracles being bound to an altar or pillar for sacrifice! Both Bhima and Heracles tread dangerous territories, battle monsters and supernatural beings, are sought to be poisoned as infants, are described as having flames bursting from them. Cacus, a monster, steals cattle guarded by Heracles, is betrayed by his sister to Heracles, just as Hidimba does with her brother to Bhima. Bhima rescues a Brahmin's daughter who is to be sent as Baka's meal, just as Heracles does with Hesione, daughter of Laomedon, about to be sacrificed to a monster. Again, moved by the sobs of Alcestis, he brings Admetus back from death, as Kunti is moved by the cries of the Brahmin family to have Bhima succour them. Savitri and Alcestis are another parallel as wives loyal unto and beyond death.

Alonso notes parallels between Jamadagni and Heracles. Both threaten the sun with arrows and receive a gift in return (a golden cup; a parasol and sandals). Alonso then draws a far-fetched parallel between Heracles and Kartavirya-Arjuna as both threaten the sea with arrows. One wonders why he has not drawn the parallel with Rama threatening the sea!

In Heracles' intimacy with his nephew and charioteer Iolaus, Alonso sees a clear parallel with Arjuna and Krishna. Heracles wins princess Iole in an archery contest, but has to leave without her, returns to kill her father (who was his weapons-trainer) and brothers and carry her off. Alonso suggests that Arjuna killing Draupadi's suitors at Kurukshetra is a parallel, even though there is no hint of the provocation being their having sought her hand. Further, he does not kill Drona, his weapons-guru.

Parallels are seen between Krishna and Dionysus. Both gods have to find refuge from persecution (by Jarasandha, Lycurgus) in the sea (Dvaraka, in the lap of Thetis in the sea), their enemies insult them (Shishupala, Pentheus) and suffer death (dismemberment of Jarasandha-Lycurgus; beheading of Shishupala-Pentheus) after a dramatic revelation of divinity.

Tiresias, blinded for striking coupling snakes or for seeing Athena and his mother bathing naked, and turned into a woman, has extensive parallels: Pandu is un-manned for killing coupling deer (but even before the curse he fails to impregnate his wives), Bhangashvana becomes a woman, has children and, like Tiresias tells the king of gods that women enjoy coitus more. Like Callimachus, Bhangashvana comes to the sacred bathing pool to refresh his horse and suffers sex-change.

Both epics stress a restoration of order on earth and in heaven after a long sequence of calamities culminating in a holocaust. The macrocosm and the microcosm are in harmony. Indra's hubris *vis-à-vis* Shiva ends, as does the reign of asuras possessing mortals. Brahmins (Drona, Parashurama) who violate their dharma are either reined in or slain along with their pupils. In both, the era of half-divine heroes and those not womb-born is brought to an end, along with direct interaction of gods with humans. Zeus specifically prohibits any child to be born of a god. Uma curses the devas to be childless. In the *Odyssey*, Athena is careful in helping Odysseus so as not to offend Poseidon. So is it with Surya *vis-à-vis* Indra with respect to Karna.

In summary, the argument is that the MBH draws extensively on its authors' "fervour for the Homeric epics and . . . very diverse Greek sources" using them in versatile ways in the Pandava-Kaurava story beginning from its outline for destruction and its formulation, with supernatural interventions ensuring its end. The roles of the critical figures — the powerful semi-divine woman as the cause of destruction, the goddess and the man, their son's fate, the adventures in exile, the double massacres and destruction of the fortified city — are modelled on the blueprint underlying the *Iliad*, *Cypria*, *Thebaid* and the Heracleian tales. The sheer bulk of the Greek presence leads Alonso to propose that the MBH was composed largely at one time with Greek texts in its authors' hands. The precision of use of Greek components militates against oral transmission of Greek texts. The lack of any archaeological evidence discounts the possibility of a real event providing the nucleus of the epic. The ease with which the Greek corpus is identifiable indicates that the MBH has come down to us quite intact in the main.

This calls for rethinking of the general theory regarding the MBH's relationship with the epic, the mythic and the didactic. Alonso argues that the MBH was written with a precise political, ideological and artistic set of objectives incorporating a multitude of dominant themes, blending all available resources in an experiment (e.g. the diverse metres and prose) which, therefore, should not be looked at from prescriptive viewpoints of "epic" and "literary". The relationship between orality and the written must also be re-examined for this text which was assuredly written at the inception and also recited as part of the ancient oral tradition. The oral component is fully assimilated into the text which regards itself as unique in comparison to compositions of the past (the Vedas). There is also the remarkable device of numerous narrative voices being used, as in the *Odyssey*, that points to a conscious artistry. Alonso points out that the creation of an epic to rearticulate perspectives of changing communities is well seen in Virgil's *Aeneid*, seeking to rearticulate the image of Rome after the massacres ending the republic.

Alonso calls for fresh research to map out, section by section, the Greco-Roman presence in the MBH, so prominent in the main corpus and present also in the secondary tales. This will also study the modes by which that archive is put to use — references, structures, characters, exhaustive borrowing from a single or diverse

sources. It will further identify components that stand outside this archive, e.g. incarnations, rebirth, the power of asceticism, the concept of sacrifice. Such a study can also lead to a re-look at lost Greek texts which seem to be embedded in the MBH (e.g. *Cypria*, *Thebaid*).

Alonso puts forward an interesting argument to discount the fashioning of the MBH during the reign of Pushyamitra Sunga, a Brahmin king (2nd and 1st century BC), since the epic criticises Brahmins who abandon their calling for weaponry. The literary nature, the sophistication of the debates, the extolling of the householder's dharma over the ascetic's, the new worship of Krishna and the fact of writing suggest a later date. Alonso argues that Hellenistic mystery cults put forward the possibility of life with ethics as a means of salvation despite the vagaries of Fate, which is what Krishna also represents. He offers a path to liberation other than through sacrifice, asceticism, pilgrimages, death in battle. The detailed knowledge of Greek legends and theatrical situations (as in the Kichaka-Draupadi-Bhima encounters) indicates maturity of borrowing. As stories from Ovid have been adapted, that indicates the 1st century AD or later, which is when the impact of Greco-Roman plastic arts is evident, and contacts from Alexandria have proliferated (Nagarjuna's sea voyages; contacts with the Satavahana kingdom). Alonso makes a powerful plea for a rethinking to break away from the claim of Indian history's isolation from the rest of the world. Following Alexander's invasion, not only did Vedic religion undergo extensive change with bhakti coming in, but Buddhism developed the cult of Bodhisattvas and other deities in Mahayana, besides incorporating roles for the laity and women. He points to the rival Satavahanas and Sakas who not only espoused Buddhists and Jains but had commercial ties with the Greco-Roman world. Sylvain Levi suggested that Indian theatre may have been invented during the Saka Kshatrapa monarchy. He argued that it is these foreign Saka rulers who replaced Prakrit for official use by literary Sanskrit. Two kings were involved in the translation of a Greek astrological text into *Yavanajataka* of Sphujidhvaja, which uses Saka dating (mid 1st century to mid 2nd century AD). In iconographic motifs Greco-Roman motifs were copied. There are considerable parallels with Greek logic and philosophic concepts in Nyaya and Vaisheshika. Alonso claims to have discredited the hypothesis of Vyasa having influenced Homer.

However, what about the dominant symbol of the sacrificial ritual that is a characteristic of early times, along with the almost total absence of reference to icons of deities? Why should references to foreigners (*mleccha*, *yavana*) indicate that the Christian era was underway? Such contacts prevailed centuries before that. Incidentally, Alonso commenting on Romila Thapar, consistently refers to her as "he/his" (p. 471, fn. 35)!

Most of the arguments advanced by Alonso can equally be applied to say that the MBH was carried to Greece and influenced the Homeric Cycle and Greek mythology.

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of June 2015)

XVIII

We shall now look at a literary allusion in which our author has made use of two allusions in one sentence, so it can be called a double allusion:

It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy forever . . .¹

Very familiar lines indeed, but where can one find the two quotations united so very harmoniously as here? Here is the famous line, stock example of Chiasmus: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" from 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' and the opening line of 'Endymion', "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever" brought together with great economy and harmony. Moreover, both are from the same poet. So here we have a rare case of a double allusion. This kind of double allusion exists elsewhere also, particularly in Gray, but that is the domain and demesne of poetry. In prose such things are not so frequent.

Another very popular allusion is the mythical allusion which is also called classical allusion. This latter term I am chary of using for it refers to a much wider field. It should properly be applied to all kinds of allusions pertaining to classical literature and not just to mythical allusions. But I am aware of the fact that mythical allusions are often called classical ones. Perhaps this is because in the poems that are usually taught in classrooms the mythical allusions are nearly always classical (i.e. Greek and Roman) and only very rarely do we come across Celtic or Norse or Egyptian myths.

So, to take up mythical allusions, I would like to give as an example that wonderful sentence on which I look with reverential awe:

. . . it is nothing more than an effective jog-trot of Pegasus, a pleasing canter or a showy gallop.²

Pegasus is the mythical winged horse from whose hoof-strike on Mount Helicon sprang the fountain of inspiration, Hippocrene (horse-fountain). He was given to

1. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 22.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

Bellerophon to conquer the Chimaera. This is an instance of mythical allusion, but in addition this part of the sentence also contains some other figures of speech, to be explained later.

There is a very fine philosophical allusion on the same page. The writer is talking about metre. Verse with a good metrical beat is not necessarily poetry:

. . . it may have the form or its shadow, it has not the essence.³

Here the allusion has blended so inextricably with the background that, unless one is an alert reader, one may not realise that there is an allusion to Plato's theory of idealism according to which everything on this earth is but a flickering, evanescent shadow of the ideal. This is a classical allusion because it alludes to classical philosophy, though not to myths.

Taking up religious allusion, the very first sentence of *The Hour of God* is most appropriately an allusion to the Bible, the Book of *Genesis*:

There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being . . .⁴

The reference is to the third sentence of *Genesis*:

And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the water.⁵

Offering any remark upon the sentence will be an act of unpardonable presumption. Let the reader feel and respond to it himself. The critic's task is performed when the aptness of the allusion is pointed out. The rest is silence.

This first essay in *The Hour of God* begins with a Biblical allusion and ends with another. One example of a religious allusion has already been given, but the reader will forgive another. It is too wonderful to be bypassed:

Then shall a fire march before thee in the night and the storm be thy helper and thy flag shall wave on the highest height of the greatness that was to be conquered.⁶

The reference, of course, is to *Exodus*, when Moses led the Jews out of Egypt. A pillar of fire guarded them from the Egyptian army. So this essay begins with an allusion to *Genesis* and ends with one to *Exodus*.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

4. *The Hour of God*, 1982 Ed., p. 3.

5. *Genesis*, 1:3.

6. *The Hour of God*, p. 4.

The reader has, by now, gained a fair idea of how effectively our author uses the figure of allusion and how great his range is. He uses both clear-cut open allusions and hidden ones, both single allusions and double ones. Mythical, religious, philosophical, literary — nothing is left out. These were but a few examples. There are many other kinds of allusions to reward the diligent reader.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

Above the natural individual law which sets up as our one standard of conduct the satisfaction of our individual needs, preferences and desires and the natural communal law which sets up as a superior standard the satisfaction of the needs, preferences and desires of the community as a whole, there had to arise the notion of an ideal moral law which is not the satisfaction of need and desire, but controls and even coerces or annuls them in the interests of an ideal order that is not animal, not vital and physical, but mental, a creation of the mind's seeking for light and knowledge and right rule and right movement and true order. The moment this notion becomes powerful in man, he begins to escape from the engrossing vital and material into the mental life; he climbs from the first to the second degree of the threefold ascent of Nature. His needs and desires themselves are touched with a more elevated light of purpose and the mental need, the aesthetic, intellectual and emotional desire begin to predominate over the demand of the physical and vital nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 197)

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of June 2015)

18. An Immortal Epic

John Milton (1608-1674) has many similarities with Sri Aurobindo. He was a civil servant, engaged in the political issues of the day, a passionate lover of freedom. His *Areopagitica* was a prescribed text for detailed study in my time. So we read it repeatedly and we recited to each other the significant passages in the work:

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them . . . as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's Image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

A political speech in favour of liberty of opinion. And strong words, used to sculpt expressive oration. So like Sri Aurobindo who was an admirer of Milton. Many Aurobindonian scholars have referred to Milton and Sri Aurobindo as being on the same wavelength. K. D. Sethna has spoken at length on Sri Aurobindo's admiration for Milton. However, according to Sethna, the style of Sri Aurobindo's epic is quite, quite different. It is mantric, for it often rises above the various gradations of the mind to the plane of overmental consciousness. Milton's poetry, however, hovers in the intellectual plane. Another Aurobindonian scholar, Romen, has given a striking evaluation of Milton and Sri Aurobindo which opens new casements into the creative forge that structured *Paradise Lost* and *Savitri*. The most important point made by Romen is that whereas *Savitri* has been composed by a person who has realised the delight of existence and wants to convey this delight to others through his poetry, *Paradise Lost* is unbendingly Puritan in spirit:

This is one aspect which is almost totally absent in Milton for his ethical attitude veils all joy to be and he shuns delight because he is there to speak of man's awe of his disobedience and also because joy is something profane and sacrilegious to the pious grimness of his Protestant spirit.¹

1. 'Savitri and Paradise Lost', *Perspectives of Savitri* Vol. One (ed. R.Y. Deshpande, 2000), p. 328.

Way back in the late 'fifties when I was wrestling with my dissertation on Sri Aurobindo's epic and looked around for English epics to compare it with, Milton readily came to mind. *Paradise Lost* had been an important text in my Honours course, and the sublime style was very helpful in memorising passages. This was the first full-fledged epic on a Christian theme from the West. But epics had to be 'heroic'! Can a passive hero allowing himself to be diddled by a wife into eating an apple easily present the heroic? Milton himself refers to the possible criticism of choosing what appeared to be an unheroic subject for his epic and gave a defence of it in Book IX, saying his subject was more heroic than the ancient epic scenes:

. . . foul distrust, and breach
 Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
 And disobedience: on the part of Heaven
 Now alienated, distance and distaste,
 Anger and just rebuke, and judgement given,
 That brought into this world a world of woe,
 Sin and her shadow Death, and Misery
 Death's harbinger: Sad talk! yet argument
 Not less but more heroic than the wrath
 Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued
 Thrice fugitive about Troy wall; or rage
 Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous'd;
 Or Neptune's ire, or Juno's, that so long
 Perplexed the Greek, and Cytherea's son.

But he was not penning down a history, was he? Milton was entering the realms of philosophy, on the nature of creation, the presence of good and evil in this creation and the possible future relieved of all malevolence. He made this clear in the very opening of the epic:

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
 Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
 Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
 Sing, Heavenly Muse . . .

Obviously the heavenly Muses were delighted to sing for him, the great scholar now grown blind, trying to come to terms with life. The days of political involvement were over for Milton. He could think, imagine and dictate at leisure, as the creative

spasm caught him. The result is a powerful tale. There is nothing tame about the manner in which the epic action is planned and executed. Again, epics were composed in classical metres in earlier times. The rhythm itself gave power to the telling. Homer and Virgil composed in hexameters, and Sri Aurobindo wrote his *Iliad*, an epic planned in twelve Books, in quantitative hexameter, the very metre used by Homer! *Iliad*, though unfinished, rises like the Parthenon in Greece.

Milton took a bold decision to engage the blank verse to narrate his tale. The blank verse had become popular by his time, especially because it could sparkle with a million nuances in the hands of Shakespeare. But a stern epic? Milton triumphed and *Paradise Lost* in blank verse would inspire others to use the verse-form for epic narration till we come to Sri Aurobindo. The magnificent structure of Milton's epic apart, there is his narrative power. Naturally, when he unveils the story of Adam's Fall, we expect God to be on the victor's stand set up by the poetic creator. But who is this? It is Satan! How come when we think of *Paradise Lost*, it is Satan who appears before us instantly? Even Sri Aurobindo places him in the front:

There is nowhere any more magnificently successful opening than the conception and execution of his Satan and Hell; nowhere has there been a more powerful portraiture of the living spirit of egoistic revolt fallen to its natural element of darkness and pain and yet still sustained by the greatness of the divine principle from which it was born, even when it has lost oneness with it and faces it with dissonance and defiance. If the rest of the epic had been equal to its opening books, there would have been no greater poem, few as great in literature.²

So, *Paradise Lost* is not a total success. Why? The keen critic in Sri Aurobindo comes out with the reason effortlessly:

It is not the province of poetry to justify intellectually the ways of God to man; what it can do, is to reveal them: but just here is the point of failure. Milton has seen Satan and Death and Sin and Hell and Chaos; there is a scriptural greatness in his account of these things. But he has not seen God and heaven and man or the soul embodied in humanity, at once divine and fallen, enslaved to suffering and evil, striving for redemption, yearning for a forfeited bliss and perfection. On this side there is no inner greatness in the poetic interpretation of his materials. In other words, he has ended by stumbling over the rock of offence that always awaits poetry in which the intellectual element is too predominant, the fatal danger of a failure of vision: he has tried to poetise the stock ideas of

2. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 93-94.

his religion and not reached through sight to a living figure of Truth and its great expressive thoughts or revelatory symbols.³

All this apart, Milton's grand English style did affect the English literature students deeply. Our pens were kept busy taking notes of those unheard of terms indicating the classical past. So many stories!

As when the potent Rod
Of Amram's son in Egypt's evil day
Waved round the Coast, up called a pitchy cloud
Of Locusts, warping on the Eastern Wind,
That ore the Realm of impious Pharoah hung
Like Night, and darkened all the Land of Nile.

Our Professor assured us it was all planned verily like a classical epic where there were battles preceded by preparations for the battle. So we allowed ourselves to get caught in the web of oratory which showed Satan in the burning lake and the fallen angels debating whether to wage war against heaven or use other methods to win. Ultimately they choose trickery. After all, the age of battle heroism is gone and when Milton was writing, political deception had already enthroned itself. It is no surprise then that Satan is able to fly around, trick even angels like Uriel, get into the Garden of Eden and give evil counsel to Eve. Though he is detected by Gabriel and banished from Eden, the mischief has been done. Raphael comes to warn Adam and Eve and relates to them the entire history of the Fall. But Fate wills otherwise and Eve is unable to resist the temptation of tasting the forbidden fruit:

Her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat:
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat,
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe
That all was lost.

From here (Book IX) onwards, the force of language wanes as we trudge towards the rest of the epic. The sequel, *Paradise Regained*, has not found enthusiastic backers in the world of literary criticism. By the time he came to this poem, the "supreme vitalising power" of Milton had sunk, says Sri Aurobindo and that the same may be said of *Samson Agonistes* as well. The four Books of the sequel, *Paradise Regained*, are about the temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert by Satan. Was there a need for this colourless follow-up? Milton seems to have felt it was

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

important he give hope to man that if he failed once in Eden, he could triumph elsewhere and resist sin. Adam's disobedience is not a full reflection of the powers of man:

. . . now sing
 Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
 By one man's firm obedience fully tried
 Through all temptation, and the Tempter foiled
 In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
 And Eden raised in the vast wilderness.

Samson Agonistes may have some faults but remains a powerful edifice in English dramatic poetry. Its birth was in the intellectual anguish of the author, of being worsted in the political scenario of his day. The personal anguish of blindness was another cause of its strength. What can be more horrifying and soul-searing than blindness for a scholar whose life lay in reading and writing? And he read and wrote not in one language but Latin, Greek and Italian as well. He could also manage with Spanish, Hebrew, French and Old English. He read extensively, travelled a good deal and was an internationally known author during his lifetime. Then came the debilitating blindness and he almost faded out of public memory. The agony, the self-pity that must have besieged Milton as he began to grow blind and finally the strength to come to terms with Nature's ways are best expressed in his most famous sonnet, a piece of sublime autobiography:

When I consider how my light is spent
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
 And that one talent which is death to hide
 Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present
 My true account, lest he returning chide,
 "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
 I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
 Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

He was very young at the time (circa 1652) of writing the sonnet. But though the poem itself concludes with seeming resignation, obviously he did not allow the

talent of poetry to be buried with him. Milton's last decade saw him very active in writing poetry and also gathering his earlier poems for publication. We find in *Poems Etc. Upon Several Occasions* the fine pastoral elegy 'Lycidas' to mourn the death of his friend. It was not too different from the world shown us by Edmund Spenser but there was definitely a greater nearness, because this English could be understood by us easily, and the rhymes clicked effortlessly.

For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
 Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
 Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
 He must not float upon his watery bier
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
 Without the meed of some melodious tear.

As with other famous poems in English literature, 'Lycidas' also gave inspirational phrases for posterity. As when the lines come up,

Were it not better done, as others use,
 To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
 Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?
 Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 (That last infirmity of noble mind)
 To scorn delights and live laborious days.

This is one of those passages that come to hand when we have to describe the way of Fate. Why not enjoy life, why suffer and struggle when ultimately everything is going to be destroyed by death? "Fame is the spur" comes the answer, and it became the title of a famous novel by Howard Spring. Published in 1940, the novel deals with the growth of the socialist labour movement in Britain. 'Lycidas' has plenty of such riches to give us and reading it repeatedly does improve one's command over handling the English language. As students we took pleasure in underlining phrases for future use: "gust of rugged wings", "the forehead of the morning sky", "the Pilot of the Galilean Lake", "the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed", and the last line but not the least, "to-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new." I am glad I went through the rigorous course of English literature as prescribed in Indian universities in the 'fifties. Otherwise, I would not have read Sri Aurobindo repeatedly, for he brings back the past greatness in the way he handles the English language, creative in every syllable.

Of Milton's other works, it is *Samson Agonistes* that detains me like his sonnet on his own blindness. It is the familiar story of Samson and Delilah from the Old

Testament. Critics have pointed out that the agony of Samson is also the agony of Milton's shattered dreams because of the Restoration. Though the theme is from the Hebrew Scripture, it makes use of the elements which shape a Greek tragedy. Much of the story is unravelled through reportage, either by messengers or the chorus. As the poem opens, Samson is already a prisoner of the Philistines. Blinded, made to work hard, he is regretfully trying to recollect his past actions: where did he really go wrong? An aspiring writer in English cannot read this work too many times. The very words used by Milton are so totally dipped in anger and anguish that they can never be heard again without the figure of Samson rising in the mind. The opening soliloquy by Samson marks unforgettable turns of phrase.

Promise was that I
Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;
Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza . . .

Eyeless in Gaza! Aldous Huxley's famous novel published in 1936. *Eyeless in Gaza* tells the story of Alexander Beavis, a promising young man who is disillusioned with the ways of the rich upper class, feels eyeless and lost in this 'civilised' society and finally turns to pacifism and mysticism. Indeed, as one reads *Samson Agonistes*, one reaps a rich legacy of classic passages. The sorrow of blindness hits Samson hard most:

O first created Beam, and thou great Word,
Let there be light, and light was over all;
Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?
The Sun to me is dark
And silent as the Moon . . .

Unlike 'Lycidas', *Samson Agonistes* gets us scurrying to classic dictionaries because of references which were familiar to Milton who had mastered languages like Greek and Latin.

Comes this way sailing
Like a stately Ship
Of Tarsus, bound for the Isles
Of Javan or Gadier . . .

Surely, the passages would have been easy to wade through for Sri Aurobindo who knew Greek and Latin literatures in the original. Fallen, but heroic still, Samson rejects freedom that could be gained by giving ransom. Death is preferable he says:

“My race of glory run, and race of shame,/And I shall shortly be with them that rest.” The Samson-Dalila dialogue is sprinkled with powerful phrases. Samson is unforgiving, and not surprisingly so. Dalila tries to exonerate herself from blame, she could withstand everything except the Priest and religion was obviously a powerful tool then to destroy even as it is today. Finally she comes out with the truth, the will-o’-the-wisp of fame that leads people to murder and destroy, to become martyrs for the cause.

But in my country where I most desire,
 In Ecron, Gaza, Asdod, and in Gath
 I shall be named among the famousest
 Of women, sung at solemn festivals,
 Living and dead recorded, who to save
 Her country from a fierce destroyer, chose
 Above the faith of wedlock-bands . . .

There is then the Harapha-Samson dialogue, verbal fireworks of a sublime kind. The ten syllables in the lines knock in our temples like the sounds of knocking in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The lines ride past us even as strength seems to have ridden into Samson with the new locks that have grown. Then the terrible scene:

As with the force of winds and waters pent,
 When Mountains tremble, those two massive Pillars
 With horrible convulsion to and fro,
 He tugged, he shook, till down they came and drew
 The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder
 Upon the heads of all who sate beneath,
 Lords, Ladies, Captains, Councillors, or Priests,
 Their choice nobility and flower, not only
 Of this but each Philistian City round
 Met from all parts to solemnise this Feast.

Sixty years ago when I sat in the classroom trying to come to terms with this terrible destruction, I could feel my eyes grow wet to just imagine the scene. But today’s students (if they do read this classic) will not be subject to that kind of pressure. They see such violence all the time happening either in their presence or on their television.

Samson Agonistes concludes with what is almost a ‘*shanti mantra*’ for us:

And calm of mind all passion spent.

(*To be continued*)

BOOK NOTES

Writing in Bengali about the Gita in the journal *Dharma*, Sri Aurobindo remarked,

The Gita is as if the bottomless sea, the source of a myriad gems. One may spend a whole life-time fathoming its depths and still not touch the bottom or gauge how deep it is. One may search for a hundred years and still find it difficult to gather even a hundredth part of the riches contained in this endless store of gems . . .

The Gita is an inexhaustible mine of jewels. Even if the jewels are gathered from this mine for ages, the coming generations will always be delighted and astonished by their acquisitions of new and priceless ones.

How apt are these words when applied also to *Savitri*.

Each one brings to his reading of *Savitri* his own approach, each benefits from his study in his own way. There is no end to what one discovers. Some feel the need to share their discovery, to spread the joy they have felt, the upliftment they have experienced. And these works become so many more testaments to the ‘inexhaustible mine of jewels’ that is *Savitri*.

Some time ago the Savitri Foundation published a series by Narad, *Inspiration from Savitri*, each book a bouquet of selections of lines and passages dealing with a single theme — ‘Colours and Gems’, ‘Earth’, ‘Art, Architecture and the Constructions of Man and God’, ‘Nature’, ‘Music and Sound’, ‘Love and Light’, ‘Joy’, ‘Man to Superman’. There could be more to look forward to.

A recent offering from the same publisher is called *Savitri In-Between*. The subtitle clarifies that it is ‘a perspective on poetic artistry’. But what does the title mean? The compiler, Akash Deshpande explains it in his preface:

“*Savitri* is well-known as the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual vision. In it, lofty Himalayan grandeur and plunging pacific depths are given in soul-stirring poetry. Quotations are taken from these heights and depths, treatises are devoted to them, and scholars as well as lay readers pause at these powerful passages.

“The poet’s afflatus continues in-between. Like the meadows at the foothills of the Himalayas and the beaches of the pacific, metaphors of Kalidasian beauty and connections of windowed insight complete the poetic landscape. *Savitri In-Between* is a collection of such lines. . . .”

The compiler admits that a selection of this kind is subjective. Inevitably so. One could say that all selections are subjective, just as all reading is subjective, just as all experience is subjective. But as so often in life, it takes another’s perception to

bring into prominence what our own seeing had somehow not fully caught. That is the value of compilations, of anthologies, of treatises, of dissertations. They allow us to see more, to come closer to that fountainhead of Light which is *Savitri*.

* * *

Sunil — The Mother's Musician by Clifford Gibson is “a collection of Sunil's correspondence with the Mother on his music and together with his voluminous exchange of letters with friends and admirers of his music over the years it forms an intimate portrait of Sunil the composer and sadhak. Sunil's own account of his childhood as well as reminiscences by veteran inmates of Sri Aurobindo Ashram round out a picture of Sunil as a person and true devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.”

* * *

Prema Nandakumar's new book on Srimad Bhagavatam *At Each Step A Luminous World* has been brought out by Auropublications. The book “is not a simple retelling of the Bhagavata, but a treatise on the many ways the Purana has inspired the philosophy of Indian life, literature and culture. The Bhagavata is rich in legends but has also long passages on philosophy. The book projects the legends to instil in the listener” [or shall we say, the reader] “faith, devotion and values. And finally it illustrates how each one of us can attain the Divine, and none is barred entry into the Bhagavata world.”

* * *

The Chandernagore Barasat Gate Cultural Association has reissued the pictorial album originally published on the occasion of the centenary of the Mother's first coming to Pondicherry in 1914. The album of about a hundred pages has as title “Eternity looked from Her on Time”.

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